

International Perspectives Commentary

The Effectiveness of Service Learning Practice for Teacher Education in Japan: For the Support of a New Subject Called, *Houshi*, for a High School in Tokyo

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Abstract: This study presented practices based on Service Learning that gave pre-service teachers ideas about the significance of Service Learning and the challenges that exist. They made lesson plans for “*Houshi*” (=Service) and conducted them in a high school in Tokyo’s public school system. Service Learning is one of the effective methods in which students improve their academic learning and develop social and civic skills through structured service activities that meet the needs of the community. Service Learning was introduced to Japan in the 1990s. Educators in Japan are interested in the application of Service Learning in grades K-12, and also in some colleges and universities in Japan. However, the introduction of Service Learning into teacher education programs is relatively new in Japan. The study particularly focuses on these three questions: (1) What impact does the project have on teacher development?; (2) What challenges exist in overcoming the difficulties in the ongoing Service Learning project?; (3) What are the positive results of the experience?

According to the study, in order for this program to succeed, it is important for the students to be given responsibilities, to understand social and educational values, and to develop a spirit of teamwork. The introduction of Service Learning in teacher education fosters teacher's abilities and teaching skills, and gives them a sense of personal growth. They can incorporate these ideas and methods from their experience of Service Learning after having become teachers. The teachers will be encouraged to be leaders in introducing these concepts of Service Learning in their schools.

Key words: Service Learning; pre-service teachers; teacher education; “*Houshi*”

Service Learning was introduced to Japan in the 1990s as both an educational philosophy and as an instructional method imported from the United States. As an educational philosophy, Service Learning reflects the belief that education should develop social responsibility in students and prepare them to be involved citizens in a democratic society. As an instructional method, Service Learning involves a blending of service activities with academic curricula, which allows students to learn through active engagement while addressing real community needs.

Educators in the field of social studies are interested in the application of Service Learning in grades K-12 in Japan. The *Social Education Act* and *School Education Act* were revised in 2001, with the stated provision “To endeavor to improve social volunteer work activities” stipulated in the legislation. National high school curriculum standards were ratified in 2009 to promote social volunteer work activities as an important part of high school education. The introduction of Service Learning has been used in the first-year experience of students in some colleges and universities in Japan, and also has been encouraged by the central government. However, the introduction of Service Learning into teacher education programs is relatively new to Japan.

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Literature Review

According to a survey by Anderson and Erickson (2003), 59 percent of teacher education programs taught pre-teachers about Service Learning strategies, only 24 percent indicated that all students participated in Service Learning as part of the program, and 18 percent of programs had pre-service teachers develop lesson plans for Service Learning in the United States. The impact of the learning experience on the student might not be maximized and sustained if the service does not include a well-crafted opportunity for reflection and integration with academic content (Hatcher & Bringle, 1997; Hess et al., 2007; Petkus, 2000; Wallace, 2000). Simons and Cleary (2006) utilized a combination of quantitative and qualitative strategies to study the impacts of Service Learning on 140 students enrolled in undergraduate psychology courses. Students mentored or tutored elementary-age students at three sites for a total of 16 hours. Subjects showed gains in their community self-efficacy, which carried over to stronger intentions to become involved in the community in the future. These positive effects of Service Learning varied little between the two activities (mentoring or tutoring) and across the three placement sites (elementary school, after-school program, or community learning center). Root and Anderson (2010) examined the impacts of Service Learning on pre-service teachers in over 25 studies. They organized these studies into five categories looking at impacts on; (1) fostering academic learning, (2) understanding of and care of students, (3) knowledge of the teaching profession and professional skills, (4) understanding and appreciation of diversity, and (5) motivation, knowledge and skills needed to implement Service Learning as a teaching method. Furco and Ammon (2001) examined the challenges of experiences in pre-service teacher education in the United States. According to their research, one of the challenges to teacher education is the need to respond to accountability requirements, ranging from No Child Left Behind, to standards of national accreditation organizations. Another challenge is that many teacher educators remain confused about the distinction between practica or student teaching and Service Learning.

In Japan, interest in Service Learning has increased at higher education institutions, but research connecting it to teacher education is still limited. In one study that pertained to teacher education, Toda (2010) showed that pre-service teachers mentored or tutored with Service Learning methods at an orphanage from 2006 to 2010, a total of 20 days. The students grew to have the capability of seeing children's personality and fully recognized the importance of communication with them. The challenge of the study showed the difficulties in adapting the activities to curriculum and teaching practice.

Overview of the project "Learn by doing"

Background of the project

High schools in the Tokyo public school system created a new subject *Houshi* (Service), in 2007. That is now required of all public high schools in Tokyo, although the meaning of *Houshi* is voluntary. Concerns expressed about Community-Service when it was forced into schools in the

United States in the 1990s were also seen in Japan (Miyazaki, 2011). Teachers are required to teach this subject since its enactment even if they are against it individually. A survey of the Tokyo teachers union reported (2008) that the reasons why teachers took passive attitudes toward teaching this subject were that they couldn't agree on the purpose of the subject and they were too busy to do additional work (Miyazaki, 2011). Therefore, common service projects were often simply uncomplicated or "routine" projects such as cleaning parks near schools, which have very little relevance for learning. As a result, there are literally no more spaces for this type of service learning activity. Under these conditions, it is necessary to learn service learning from other countries, particularly the United States, to develop teaching strategies from the point of view of civic engagement, and to provide more opportunities and resources for teachers, administrators, and community members.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical background of Service Learning is based on the action-reflection theories of David Kolb, who developed the Experiential Learning Cycle, a learning process in which knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (1984). Kolb illustrates the process of reflection in the Experiential Learning Cycle (1984). Similarly, Hatcher and Bringle, showed that effective reflection activities (1) link experience to learning objectives, (2) are guided, (3) occur regularly, (4) allow feedback and assessment, and (5) include the clarification of values (1999).

Relationship between this project and Social Studies' education

The National Council for the Social Studies (2007) states that, "Service Learning greatly enhances the potential for social studies teachers to complete their mission of educating informed and active citizens, who are committed to improving society through the democratic process"(n.p.). The aims of Social Studies' education are to prepare students to be involved citizens in a democratic society, and to develop social responsibility, and the capability for social change. *Houshi* means to foster a sense of caring for others, however, its similarity to "charity," raises many concerns in Japan about extreme patriotism or even jingoism, which could be thought of the government or cultural arrogance as blind. Nonetheless, adding aspects from social change education to *Houshi* gives it balance. Therefore the practice is focused on project development and social change along with charity (Morton, 1995).

Participating in the project: "Learn by doing"

Class: The seminar class of 2009-2010

Make-up of students:

Sex: 2 males and 7 females

Grade: 3(2009) and 4(2010) of pre-service teachers (undergraduate college students), majoring in social studies education

Career after graduation: 5 elementary school teachers, 4 part-time teachers (expected full time teachers next year)

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Participants: 2 graduate students from teaching profession (junior high school teacher: 20 years of experience, high school teacher: 16 years of experience) and one coordinator from the local area.

School: A public high school in Tokyo which is “typical” of high schools in that city. Seven classes of 1st graders, 2 teachers who are in charge of *Houshi*.

Term: From Sep. in 2009 to Mar. in 2010. 2 to 4 hours of class for 10 days.

Involvement: Pre-service teachers cooperated with teachers from the high school directly. Graduate students of teaching profession made suggestions when pre-service teachers needed some advice about making lesson plans. Students were required to write the goal before every activity and reflect after every activity. The faculty attended the reflection meetings.

Learning Cycle: The Kolb Learning Cycle (Kolb 1984) was applied to practice to combine action with reflective thinking, to develop greater understanding of the content being studied. This learning cycle involved cooperation with high school teachers; making a lesson plan; trial lesson; remaking a lesson plan; practice; reflection and feedback. Reflection took place alone, with classmates, with high school teachers, and with community partners and involved reflection before action, during action, and after action.

Table 1: *Sequence and pre-service teachers’ roles*

Sequence	The roles of pre-service teachers
1. Orientation	Presentation: Taking charge of each class
2. Introduction	Presentation: Taking charge of each class
3. Sharing experiences of disasters, such as '95 Earthquake	Presentation & facilitates: Taking charge of each class
4. Experience of rescue operations (AED)	Coordinate the activities
5. Experience of distributing food	Coordinate the activities
6. Pre-guidance to visit institutions	Presentation & facilitates: Taking charge of each class
7. Visiting institutions —preschools, elementary schools and special-needs schools	Company and support
8. Reflection of visiting institutions	Facilitates: Taking charge of each class
9. Preparation of high school students’ presentation (about their experience)	Facilitates & support: Taking charge of each class
10. High school students’ presentation	Coordinate the assemblies
11. College students’ presentation	Presentation & coordinate the assemblies

Purpose of the study and research questions

The study was designed to trace the impact of Service Learning practice on a select group of pre-service teachers, who made teaching plans and conducted them in the classes. This research will present practices based on Service Learning that give prospective teachers ideas about the significance of Service Learning, and the challenges that exist. The research seeks to confirm pre-service teachers' commitment to service. The study particularly focuses on these three questions:

What impact does the project have on teacher development?

What challenges exist in overcoming the difficulties in the ongoing Service Learning project?

What are the positive results of the experience?

Method

The approach involved analysis of previous studies that apply Service Learning to teachers' educational practices. Participating students were then given questionnaires before service, in the middle of service, and after service. Reviewing interviews involving note making and recording of responses of participating students were held. Additionally alumni who participated in this practice six months ago and became teachers; and alumni who participated in a similar practice four years ago and became teachers were likewise interviewed.

The Interview Structure

Several open-ended questions were sent out in advance by e-mail. Students and graduates were informed that the interview was being used for the study in order to improve the quality of higher education, and that they could give criticism or negative comments freely.

Group 1

The students who took part in the above project were interviewed in March of 2011, immediately prior to their completion of teacher training and university graduation. Interviews were conducted as semi-structured face-to-face conversation, but in the middle of them, Tokyo was hit by strong earthquakes (The East Japan Great Earthquake) therefore part of the interviews was continued by telephone. About 60 minutes were required to complete each interview per person.

Group 2

Group 2 was made up of 5 of the 9 students who formed part of group 1, who were now teachers. They were comprised of three elementary school teachers, one part-time elementary school teacher and one part-time junior high school part-time teacher. The interviews were conducted by telephone in October 2011. About 20 minutes were required to complete each interview.

Group 3

This group was made up of 3 graduates who participated in a similar project in 2007-2008. They work as teachers, respectively at a junior high school, an elementary school and a special

education school. The interview was carried out as a group interview, and about 90 minutes were required to complete it.

The text was organized around three research questions of this study above. For the analysis, similar responses were collected as specific examples and then were classified into several key words. For example, the remark "To concentrate on one thing, to bear up and complete their duties on school days led to a sense of fulfillment" was classified into the key word "fulfillment." The statement such as "I'm unsure about taking care about taking charge of classroom because I don't know the first thing about volunteer work" was classified into the key word "lack of self-confidence". Afterwards the correlation of key words was arranged. The qualitative data were analyzed by two data analysts (a graduate student and one of the authors).

Qualitative Results

Group 1: College students who were about to graduate

What impact did the project have on you?

Most of the study participants started to work on the project with hesitation or embarrassment, because they hadn't been exposed to the subject in their high school, and Service Learning related teaching methods hadn't specifically been taught. Their remarks showed their initial hesitation and these difficulties evolved into a sense of fulfillment, and they realized the meaning and importance of what they were going to accomplish. The sense of contribution and achievement helped them overcome this difficulty. As one student explained, "Before, I didn't have any experience in teaching this subject and didn't even know the first thing." Another insightful comment made by a study participant was that "I was so happy that we could communicate with many people and I realized how important interpersonal contact was. It made me joyful." Both comments show that the interpersonal relationships made possible by this Service Learning experience was linked to their own fulfillment. The study participants' comments about this question could be categorized in the following way;

First example: personal development

The study participants referred to perseverance, a sense of achievement and the importance of teamwork, and dealing with diverse opinions.

Second example: the good influence of teachers.

The study participants remarked that they were impressed by the good example of the high school teachers, and that they noticed that they learned from their attitudes. As one student explained, "The teachers in that school are our ideal. I want to emulate their kindness with our future students."

Third example: teaching skills

The study participants spoke about teaching skills. "I learned practical ways to instruct and teach a lively lesson," said one pre-service teacher. Students in this category also mentioned that Service-Learning was useful for student teaching and/or internships.

What challenges exist in overcoming the difficulties in the ongoing project?

Remarks by study participants about “getting over difficulties” were classified into two categories. One was to “halt the temptation of giving up” which related to the fact that they were completely responsible for the classes. The other was “the desire to achieve” which related to expectation or confidence from their surroundings. Here, subjects indicated that they were filled with great expectation. They were very grateful to the high school teachers, the community coordinator, and the faculty, who encouraged them not to give up, to do their best, and to reach the goals they had set for themselves. Another category of response, related to the support of peers, is represented in the statement that “I was able to get over a problem because my buddies encouraged me.” The friends who were challenged together were transformed. One study participant said, “It was a trying experience not only for me but also others. I’ll never give up!” For these subjects, being able to overcome the difficulties was due in large part to the influence of their peers.

Group 2 Teachers with 6 months of teaching experience

How do you use the experience from the project while teaching in your school?

Teacher education graduates said that they gained useful knowledge from the experience in the project for their teaching profession in the future. They expect to utilize this new approach in teaching. All of them replied, “The experience was very enlightening.” These pre-service teachers talked about their discussions, putting themselves in the students' shoes. They could modify their lessons depending on their students' aptitude, or they could tailor the lesson to be specific for each individual student. On the other hand, researchers noticed that the subjects were not always able to implement what they learned. Various reasons prevented them, such as being beginner teachers, having busy schedules, and an overall lack of time. Nonetheless, these students stated their hope to integrate this knowledge in the future. Moreover, they recognized that the sensitivity and co-operation of the teachers of the school enabled them to succeed. For example, as one stated, “that is what made the experience so special”.

Group 3 : Graduates who participated in a similar practice in 2007-2008.

How do you use the experience from the project while teaching in your school?

Subjects in this category recognized that they are using their experiences unconsciously in their classes. As one stated, “When I was in charge of a work-study program where students learn through work experience, I applied the same procedures that we had learned: pre-planning, experience and reflection. I learned the importance of pre-planning and reflection through the experience of the project. Also, I tried to link our academic study with experiences in real life situations.” Looking back they realize the value of the project, as it brought a new perspective to the school, even though they could not implement it single-handedly. One of the graduates said, “We couldn’t change the curriculum of the school but we could offer them something unique.” These participants looked back on this experience as something important and unique. One graduate commented “the school which accepted us for the project was so generous. It is unique that college students from one seminar class manage entire classes for an extended

period of time” Another agreed, saying, “I can really understand now how amazing those teachers were for accepting us. I appreciate them and want to grow up to be a teacher like them.”

Some initial conclusions

What impact does the project have on teacher development?

Self-esteem and sense of self efficacy; Sense of personal growth; Increase in knowledge and instruction capabilities; Awareness of teacher as a role model

What challenges needed to be overcome in the project?

There is a lot of pressure and substantial responsibilities for participants; Deeper understandings of significance of the project needed; Ongoing need of participants to encourage each other

What are the positive results of the experience?

Teachers with six months teaching experience have knowledge which will be applicable in the classroom: Teachers with three year experience have been able to apply their experience with Service Learning in the classroom successfully: Increased interaction and active cooperation with community (via managing the projects).

In order for this Service Learning to succeed in Japanese teacher education programs, it is important for the students to be given responsibilities, to understand social and educational values, and to develop a spirit of teamwork. The introduction of Service Learning into teacher education fosters teachers’ abilities, teaching skills, and sense of personal growth. These are ideas and methods they can incorporate when they become practicing teachers who will be encouraged to be leaders in introducing these concepts of Service Learning in their schools.

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