

Reflections on the Pedagogical Experience of Social Responsibility Practised in a University in Taiwan

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Abstract—This study focuses on college students' practical experiences of engaging in a university project concerning social responsibility. This project was conducted in Y University in Taiwan, and employed observations and interviews to analyze teachers', students' and community members' perceptions about social responsibility in a university setting. The results indicate that students undertook work in inter-disciplinary professions in order to care for local needs and solve social problems in the Zaoqiao area. Through service learning and a project-based competition, Y University effectively undertook acts of social responsibility to assist the local community to live happily, and to achieve qualifying intergenerational circumstances.

Keywords—college students, practical experience, university social responsibility

I. INTRODUCTION

Integrating the cognitions and capability of social responsibility into higher education is an important educational issue with regard to the development of college students' civic awareness and social consciousness. Such educational thought requires teachers to identify specific learning objectives on the basis of social needs, using practical teaching methods to advance students' problem-based learning abilities, and implementing collaborative learning and work-related projects within a college [1]. We can employ an experience-based, service learning approach to respond to the local social needs, carry out through a series of actions and reflections in the local community. Students were able to integrate their academic knowledge into real-life social scenarios in order to work with community members, and to reflect on and execute the process of problem solving and constructing social alternatives. Through the experience of fieldwork and service learning, students increased their social awareness, thus developing their sense of civic citizenship and social responsibility.

The current project of university social responsibility focused on real local, social problems, designing a curriculum and instructional strategies to integrate social issues into academic courses. Through the combination of theoretical knowledge and practical competence, students were able to reflect on complex social issues and facts,

working with others and playing the positive role of social agents who effectively helped community members' with their level of happiness and wellbeing. In order to implement social responsibility in a university context and promote social innovation among both teachers and students at college, we can assist students with understanding local needs and developing practical actions to solve the social problems faced by the local community. By way of service learning and innovative learning, students can employ cross-border professional knowledge and competence to perform their acts of social responsibility. Due to scant literature on the theoretical development and practical process of social responsibility in a university context, this study focused on the issue as an emerging one and clarified the university's role in terms of social responsibility. Therefore, this study explores the development and reflections of a project of social responsibility conducted in a university setting in Taiwan, and considers the relevant curriculum practices and students' service learning performance.

A. *The connection between university social responsibility and local need*

A university is the center of knowledge creation and diffusion. Higher education has the unique potential and multiple opportunities to accelerate the transition and transformation of our society. By undertaking a social responsibility project in a university setting, we can improve students' awareness about their local community and social responsibility. Most universities have begun to adopt and develop some strategies with regard to executing their social responsibility [2,3]. By incorporating social responsibility into the design of college curriculum and research, a university recognizes the importance of social entrepreneurship, striving and enriching its educational programs, and actively participating and working together with the local community to rethink social problems.

Social responsibility in a university setting focuses on the cognition and ability to effectively respond to local needs and promote social change. It is the university's responsibility to educate students on citizenship through instructional methods, and to develop their awareness of social justice, social equity and civic development [3]. Through such a project-based instructional design, students

can engage in the local community to uncover social needs and unresolved problems. They can employ their academic cognitive skills, theoretical knowledge, interpersonal relationships, ethical values and practical skills to positively participate in the local community [4]. In the current study, these learning processes and outcomes took place outside the university classroom. Based on their fieldwork and communication with community members, students had real opportunities to critically analyze their educational and social professions, and engage in local situations to promote their learning about civic awareness and social responsibility.

B. Practical reflections on service learning and social responsibility

Service learning effectively engages students' social responsibility, personal interests and civic awareness [5]. Students who participate in the service learning of community activities have a strong sense of civic consciousness and social responsibility. They tend to have achieved greater academic success and constructed interpersonal relationships and social networks [6]. In the current university project of social responsibility, students worked with local, social institutions or nonprofit, professional organizations to enhance their social awareness and analytical competence. They were able to connect academic theory and practical problems in such a ways as to rethink and improve their critical thinking or problem solving skills [7]. Students were also able to communicate with others effectively, and play the civic role of innovation and effective citizenship through service learning.

By undertaking service learning, students can care for others who may be situated in a disadvantaged minority. This, in turn, provides the students themselves with the social benefits of empathic communication and mutual interaction, enabling them to construct their trust and respect with others [8]. With cross-cultural understanding and the development of civic engagement, students can experience another way of social living and reflect on social differences, acquiring empathy for diversity and growing aware of inequality and injustice in the local community [9]. In the process of undertaking a university project on social responsibility, students can express their beliefs, emotions and behaviors related to cross-professional teamwork, and developed interdisciplinary and partnership relationships in the process of the project about university social responsibility [10]. By undertaking service learning in a university project on social responsibility, students can contact, understand and empathize with local community members' individual or social needs, and participate in local lives so as to begin to care about the status of minority groups. They employed their academic abilities and moral obligation in order to develop their professional competence to help others, by solving problems related to disadvantaged situations.

II. METHODS

A. Study design

In order to further explore college students' perceptions of the learning activities and reflective practices of a university project on social responsibility, this study used observations and interviews to collect the data. The observation records provided authentic learning materials, and the interview data enabled the researcher to analyze, criticize, construct and reflect on the multiple dimensions of the social dialectic construction, as a basis to then form conclusions and recommendations for the instructional praxis in higher education.

This study selected Y University as the sample university in Northern Taiwan. This university focuses on practical and vocation-oriented educational applications. In order to implement social responsibility, Y University considered the local issues of minority needs, intergenerational educare activities, long-term care, and Hakka culture. Y University designed the project to articulate the connections between grandparents and their grandchildren could be made happier in Zaoqiao Township, Miaoli, Taiwan. This project focused on the educare service of the intergeneration and the Hakka culture, and combined the inter-disciplinary courses of Sociology and Language and Culture, with 123 students. These courses arranged for 16 social entrepreneurs and non-profit organization experts to give special lectures, and also arranged 29 service learning activities. In addition, there were two problem-solving competitions implemented for each course. The competitions focused on local needs, working with primary schools and social work institutes, and assisted students in the research and analysis of social issues regarding elderly care, intergenerational educare services, and the Hakka cultural inheritance. This project also established an online community to enable exchange and interaction about these instructional materials and service learning experiences.

B. Observations

The researcher used observations to collect information about the practice considerations of teachers, students and community members, and obtained first-hand data on learning practices in the local community. The observation records from the two courses and 29 service learning activities provided the researcher with numerous authentic and meaningful insights, learning and service information, and assisted the researcher in discovering and interpreting local practices based on the social responsibility project. The observation records also helped the researcher to find meaningful answers to the research objectives regarding this social issue, and to explore the realistic and diverse situations with which to interpret the process and praxis of a university project on social responsibility.

C. Interviews

In order to enrich the depth and breadth of this research, interviews were conducted with 12 teachers, 123 students and 26 community members to explore their perceptions

about the practical activities related to university social responsibility. The interviews helped the researcher to deepen, broaden, and gain more valuable research data to test, represent, and interpret the social practices responding to the research rationale. The interviews yielded relevant ideas on social issues pertaining to elderly care, intergenerational interactions, social services, and service learning. By obtaining interviewees' thoughts on this university project on social responsibility, the researcher was able to analyze their realistic and practical perceptions on the development of conscious awareness and social transforming reflections.

D. Data analysis

In implementing the observations and interviews, the researcher employed digital tools to record the observations and interviews in order to help the processes of transcription, coding, analysis, interpretation and reflection of the data. By considering the teachers', students' and community members' perceptions by their different social backgrounds and practical experiences, the researcher continued to reflect and explore the data from their different viewpoints, thus locating the authentic meanings of their perspectives so as to conduct the research dialogues. The researcher organized, documented, analyzed, explored and checked the data to check for the authenticity and reliability of the observations and interviews. Based on the theoretical considerations of objectivity and fairness with regard to research data, the researcher paid attention to the multiple verifications of the study data, and checked the validity and reliability of the internal and external research materials through a process of triangulation. Based on the articulations found in the observations, interviews and theoretical literature, the researcher was then able to eliminate erroneous information that was subjective or unrelated to the purpose of the study, and to clarify the important research arguments from more realistic and reliable research data.

III. RESULTS

A. Focusing and analyzing on local needs and social issues

The Zaoqiao area is comprised mostly of the elderly population. The young adults living in Zaoqiao had little Hakka identity, without a deep heritage in the Hakka culture. It was necessary for Y University to coordinate the relevant activities and combine academic resources to create a practical project based on the university's social responsibility ethos. Firstly, teachers encouraged students to understand the family background and life interests of the local community, and assisted grandparents and grandchildren to interact about their own interests. Secondly, teachers and students designed games to stimulate the community members to focus on their personal interests and social needs. Through real participation in the daily life of the local community, students found out the real needs of the elders and the potential for local cultural development.

The elderly people and their families engaged in this project to satisfy their family need to build friendly and happily living environments, and to help them grow more satisfied with their local community.

B. Implementing the integration of interdisciplinary professions and problem-based instruction

The current project was based on the intergenerational needs of the educare service of the grandparents and their grandchildren, as well as on the Hakka culture. Y University assigned professional staff from the School of Humanities and Social Sciences and from the General Educational Center, who jointly implemented this university project on social responsibility. The students who engaged in this project enhanced their cross-disciplinary capabilities in order to understand local needs, and developed local connections to implement the university's social responsibility program in response to those needs.

At the beginning of the project, the researcher focused on considering local needs and establishing social awareness. Given the problem-based instruction provided by the Sociology and Language and Culture courses, the researcher invited professors delivering interdisciplinary courses to instruct students to perform problem solving, group interaction, community service, and thematic learning. The academic professors employed multiple instructions to advance students' social awareness and social working competences, such as sharing opinions, community care activities, presenting group learning, and reflective representations, from the perspective of interdisciplinary learning and community learning. This project also invited local partnership experts to assist teachers and students in discussing and resolving the local problems about the intergenerational educare service, Hakka culture, and long-term family care. To cultivate students' problem solving abilities and help them to combine academic theory with off-campus practice, community experts helped us to explore the real needs of the local community in order to implement the social responsibility activities. In the process of interacting with the elderly, the researcher tried to think about the feasible relationship between grandparents and their grandchildren. By listening to the stories of the elderly, students grew to understand the cultural characteristics of different generations.

C. Practical service learning actions

In the past, the instructional models of Y University were mainly teacher-dominated lectures in the classroom. There were few opportunities to explore the social needs of the local community and Hakka culture in Miaoli. Through interdisciplinary learning and field investigations, the students in the current study employed the problem-oriented practices of the innovative instructional model to enhance their cross-border thinking and social service cognitions pertaining to family care and happiness, specifically with regard to the elderly in the Zaoqiao area. In addition, their service learning in the Zaoqiao area engendered interactions among teachers, students and community members, in the

name of exploring social alternatives to solve local problems.

The value of field exploration and service learning helped students to understand the social disadvantages of the elderly and social educare services. Based on the students' observations and interviews, this project effectively assisted students to recognize key social and cultural facts in the local community, and to develop a social consciousness in response to the social needs of the disadvantaged groups. According to the curriculum design of service learning, teachers and students undertook social and cultural explorations of Zaoqiao, deepening their awareness of local problems, strengthening their cooperative relationship with the community, and representing real-life scenarios of intergenerational educare activities.

The researcher also found that students effectively adopted a positive thinking style and learning motivation with regard to the social problems of family happiness and cultural identity, establishing an imagination of social care imagination encompassing civic awareness, social responsibility, and the Hakka cultural inheritance. They interacted with the elderly in the social institutions, creating rapport with specific elders over a prolonged period of time, providing care and condolences, being good listeners, discussing topics of interest with them, and learning about local stories in response to the elderly's interests and needs.

D. Competitions and online community formation

Based on the observation and interview records, most students indicated that the project-oriented competitions helped them to think deeply about the issues of grandparents' and grandchildren's lives, and about caring for their intergenerational, interactional activities in the local community. By participating in the cross-disciplinary competitions on the production of knowledge and in cooperative teamwork, the students demonstrated the importance of intergeneration educare and social service consciousness about civic action, and established civic literacy pertaining to social intergenerational care and the Hakka culture heritage.

This project showcased the instructional materials of teachers, students and the local community via the Internet and Facebook. The online community provided further information about the figures, field notes, videos and reflective records that emerged from this project. Community members were able to access this platform to find out more about the learning materials and social practices. In addition, in order to expand the implementation of the project and promote its wider social influence, the researcher invited teachers from different fields or schools and organized professional dialogues in the form of regular reading sessions on intergenerational educare services and the social culture, in order to support and advance their social literacy and pedagogical competences. Based on the teachers' interviews, the professional community demonstrated a clear understanding of service learning, and helped them to apply cross-domain, innovative instructional

strategies. Most teachers indicated that their social reflections, professional awareness, and pedagogical transformation were improved by the online community and professional dialogues. Their professional subjectivity and social reflections meaningfully engaged their professional practices in the context of this project, in such a way as to implement Y University's social responsibility ethos in a practical way.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Social responsibility provides a foundation for developing students' academic knowledge and practical competence to help those who suffer from the problems of injustice or inequality. Students can engage in university projects of social responsibility to face social conflict and cooperate with minority groups in order to address the latter's disadvantaged situations. Moreover, by so doing, students gain additional professional and practical abilities in developing university-community relationships, and in helping disadvantaged groups to improve their quality of life in the local community. Students can also further develop their beliefs in social justice and in the welfare of others, enabling a consistency with civic values and helping them to perceive the social value of service learning activities, ultimately making them eager to widen their social networks and contribute to human welfare.

Through mutual participation and understanding between a university and its local community, students can develop a positive relationship with social awareness, civic engagement and social responsibility, and can improve their interdisciplinary abilities to cross cultural and social boundaries. Students thus also have the opportunity to observe and listen to social minorities, enabling them to implement useful alternatives to help those living in an environment of economic poverty, social marginalization, and geographical inaccessibility, through a university project of social responsibility. In the current study, this project further enabled students to integrate academic knowledge into local community practices so as to construct user-friendly, intergenerational educare activities.

In the process of implementing Y University's social responsibility project, the researcher established a digital platform and online community for networking, and for exchanging and integrating practical information about curriculum design, teaching activities, and the learning outcomes of social caring, intergenerational educare activities, service learning, and family services. These digital tools encouraged teachers and students to consider cross-border innovations and social strategies that would enable them to cooperate with related institutions to solve local problems with community members. Moreover, this project assisted students in developing cross-domain technological and creative thinking skills, and promoted their awareness of key social and cultural facts in the local community. In participating in community service and the thematic competitions, students had recourse to cross-disciplinary professions to respond to local community

needs and solve social problems. What, therefore, do we want to teach our college students? Based on the practices and experiences of the current project, the researcher found that undertaking community service, care action, and developing problem-solving thinking enhanced students' expertise and helped to construct greater civic awareness in society.

Y University provided resources to assist in the development of this project. Considering the demographic changes, topographical constraints and cultural characteristics of the Zaoqiao area, the project combined academic staff and social services to enhance the quality of life and social wellbeing of the elderly, and family happiness. By integrating teachers' professions and instructional equipment in Y University, the researcher coordinated the faculty and relevant equipment to expand students' social service competences in such a way as to respond to the social needs of long-term care, intergenerational educare services, Hakka culture, and family happiness. This project helped Y University to fulfill its social responsibility commitments and to strengthen the organic link between the local community and the university. Through the service learning undertaken in the community and collaborative teaching between local experts and social entrepreneurs, the university's ethos of social responsibility was fulfilled. This project not only helped students to explore the needs of their local community and thus enrich the scope of educare for grandparents and their grandchildren, but also expanded the influence of Y University on the development of the cooperation between the university and its local community.

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