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RUNNING HEAD: From Biloxi to Cape Town

From Biloxi to Cape Town: Curricular Integration of Service Learning

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Abstract

Team Reach Out started as a student-initiated service-learning project with the goal of providing on-going assistance to the victims of Hurricane Katrina. Four years after Hurricane Katrina, Team Reach Out refocused efforts to Cape Town, South Africa, where four senior nursing students and one science student integrated their leadership skills with the application of public health knowledge, compassion, and concern to work in partnership with several international health agencies. This article reviews the service-learning framework, course planning, and implementation of a recent service-learning project.

Key words: service learning, nursing education, community partnership

Introduction

Service learning is a reciprocal partnership that bridges the gap between professional education and society. It is a powerful teaching and learning strategy that engages students in learning while helping communities help themselves (Poirrier, 2001). It provides an experiential, collaborative, discipline-based relationship between students and community members for a reciprocal service learning experience and allows an opportunity for reflection. Service learning sets the stage for a lifelong commitment to civic duty, social awareness, and engagement while providing unique learning experiences which focus on building citizenship, cultural diversity, community partnerships, knowledge of community resources, critical thinking skills, and respect for humankind.

In nursing, service learning is an excellent tool to help bridge classroom learning and community experiences (Bailey, 2002). Both students and community benefit from service learning. Students benefit from the exposure to real-life dilemmas and first-hand experience of joint team efforts. Communities benefit from the knowledge and creativity available from academia (Richards, Novak, and Davis, 2009).

Team Reach Out, a Purdue University School of Nursing service-learning project, began as a student-sponsored aid and recovery effort focused on assisting the Gulf Coast region after the destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina in August 2005. Purdue School of Nursing students and their faculty made a three-year commitment that included six visits to the region. Team Reach Out Biloxi was a partnership between the Purdue School of Nursing and Coastal Family Health Clinics, a major healthcare provider to the Gulf Coast region. Over the course of the three years, students utilized their baccalaureate

nursing education and clinical skills to show their care and compassion to the Gulf Coast region's vulnerable and displaced residents. Overall, 33 Purdue nursing students and 5 faculty worked at 8 different clinic locations which extended from Pascagoula, Mississippi on the east to Pass Christian, Mississippi on the west. This gave the students a broad perspective and allowed them to compare and contrast experiences. Details about Team Reach Out Biloxi have been previously published (Richards, et al., 2009).

Four years after Hurricane Katrina, Team Reach Out refocused efforts to Cape Town, South Africa. In 2009, four senior nursing students and one pre-medical science student integrated their leadership skills with application of public health knowledge, compassion, and concern as they worked in partnership with several international health agencies.

Process

The faculty team leader/advisor completed an exploratory trip to Johannesburg and Cape Town South Africa in March of 2008, meeting with prospective community partners. Each of the local healthcare leaders invited the development of a collaboration. Due to the richness of each setting and the overwhelming need for human and financial resources, the choice was extremely difficult. Cape Town was selected as the city site through a comprehensive assessment using the International Community Assessment Model (ICAM) (Novak, 2007). Healthcare and educational partners within the city were selected in collaboration with the Christel House Academy school nurse, faculty, and staff. Subsequently, students from the Purdue School of Nursing and College of Science were invited to apply through notification in their respective student newsletters. Selection was based upon the clarity of the student's goals and understanding of cultural

humility and service learning. After selection, each student wrote an additional travel grant application to the university's Office of Engagement. Below is a description of the partners involved in this project and the experiences each provided.

Partners

The students worked with four different care organizations. Christel House International is a 501(c) (3) public charity which operates learning centers in impoverished neighborhoods with the goal of creating sustainable social and educational impact. Between 1999 and 2002, Christel House opened five learning centers in Mexico, India, South Africa, Venezuela and the United States. Currently, Christel House serves over 3000 students, their families and communities (Christel House, 2009). Christel House K-12 Academy in Cape Town helps children around the world break the cycle of poverty, realize their hopes and dreams, and become self-sufficient, contributing members of society (Christel House, 2009).

The Academy invited the Purdue students to participate in the Inaugural Celebration of a new school facility and campus. Weekend cultural experiences included a trip to Robben Island, an ecological and historical heritage site where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned from 1963-1990; Table Mountain, a protected natural habitat with 1,500 plant species; and a game and nature preserve.

Team Reach Out also worked with volunteers from three different U.S. universities on site at the Themba Care Orphanage. The orphanage provides a safe and compassionate environment for approximately 20 children who are HIV positive. In the majority of cases the parents had died of AIDS; however, some children were placed in the setting by their parents to avoid stigma within their respective communities. The

orphanage is run by an executive director, two registered nurses/"sisters", a teacher, a staff of five nursing assistants, and local volunteers.

Other than one older child, 95 percent of the children ranged in age from 18 months to four years. Students were able to complete Denver Developmental Screenings and health assessments and to work with the sisters in medication dispensation and reconciliation. The majority of the children demonstrated global developmental delay on the screenings. Students played and cared for the children in this warm, caring, inviting preschool environment. The students reflected their difficulty in saying goodbye to the children.

The team also worked at Gatesville Medical Center, a multispecialty large private Indian hospital located in Cape Town. Team Reach Out students were able to care for pediatric patients and effectively compare and contrast this South African state-of-the-art private hospital with other healthcare settings. Diagnoses included respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), pneumonia, asthma, gastroenteritis/dehydration, and meningitis.

Students were able to complete health assessments and immunize patients under the supervision of South African Registered Nurse specialty clinic coordinators and their faculty advisor at the Tafelsig Community Health Center. This center provides care to approximately 9,000 low income patients each month. In addition to health promotion visits across the lifespan, upper and lower respiratory infections, gastroenteritis, and urinary tract infections were common diagnoses. A minor emergency/urgent care clinic was on site. Tafelsig also has one of the largest TB and HIV/AIDS patient populations in Cape Town.

The students' week of clinical experiences culminated with a presentation of a health fair at the Christel House Academy. The students had worked with the World Health Organization, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Johnson and Johnson, and local Cape Town universities to insure culturally appropriate materials for the health fair. This health fair focused on school and family health promotion and included the following stations: pre-natal and newborn care and parenting; prevention of tuberculosis, HIV/AIDs, and malaria; healthcare careers; science experiments (with pre-med student); health screenings including height, weight, blood pressure, glucose, and cholesterol. The Academy ran special bus routes from the school to and from area shanty towns to bring parents and other community members to the school health fair. Overall, the Christel House Academy Health Fair was attended by 600 children and 200 parents.

Student Responses

Students who have participated in both Team Reach Out Biloxi and Team Reach Out South Africa have provided poignant and insightful reflections regarding their experiences. Community partners have also indicated that the students have been very professional and were able to provide much-needed support. Please see Table 1 for student reflections. (INSERT TABLE 1)

Evaluation

Overall, 37 Purdue nursing students and five faculty members participated in Team Reach Out. As a component of the project evaluation, faculty wanted to assess the understanding of the critical components of effective service-learning. Three months after the trip, Team Reach Out South Africa students were asked to complete an anonymous

survey regarding service learning. (INSERT TABLE 2). Students were also asked to define service-based learning. Table 3 reviews their responses. (INSERT TABLE 3).

Summary

This project is in line with the mission of Purdue University School of Nursing, which is “to serve the citizens of Indiana, the nation, and the world through discovery that expands the realm of nursing knowledge, learning through the dissemination and preservation of knowledge that prepares graduates for...leadership in their work settings, engagement through the application of nursing science in local to global healthcare settings, and advocacy through participation in healthcare legislation and policy that respect diverse client populations” (Purdue University School of Nursing, 2009).

Students felt strongly that service learning is able to enhance student learning while also building relationships with community service organizations. Students reported encountering minimal barriers to the implementation of these projects and also were not reluctant to participate in these activities. Students also agreed that they would continue to participate in service-learning activities in the near future.

In reviewing students’ definitions of service learning, it is seen that the students grasp the concept of reciprocity involved in service learning. However, two students used the term “volunteering” which denotes more of a community service aspect rather than engagement with the community. Overall, it appears that the students held a favorable view of service-learning and understood the components involved in its process.

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Table 1.
Student Reflections

<i>Team Reach Out Biloxi Student Reflections</i>
<p>“It was a wonderful experience to be able to meet so many interesting people and use our knowledge of health care to provide support to this community.”</p> <p>“Every victim was thinking about their neighbor in terms of their needs.”</p> <p>“Everyone expressed appreciation and hope.”</p> <p>“My most meaningful memory is the incredible impression each Mississippian made on me. It was amazing to me that through all of the tragedy, devastation, and loss, their southern hospitality and gentleness was still very much alive.”</p>
<i>Team Reach Out South Africa Student Reflections</i>
<p>“We were so fortunate to see the healthcare extremes, from the poorest of the poor clinics to the private hospitals. It was such a diverse spectrum to work in.”</p> <p>“Traveling to South Africa was an eye-opening experience in so many ways. I’ll never forget the striking beauty of the country contrasted with the devastating poverty that runs rampant; I was both impressed and surprised by the resourcefulness of their healthcare system.”</p> <p>“The trip was incredible. So much poverty and beauty and riches in the same area. The people touched my life and I hope that I did the same for some of them.”</p>

Table 2.

Student and Provider Responses of Service-Learning Questionnaire

Purdue University School of Nursing Service-Learning Questionnaire Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Undecided (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1)	Student Average (n=5)
1. Service-learning at Purdue University School of Nursing may be a catalyst for:	
a. assisting societal needs.	4.75
b. student learning.	4.8
c. building relationships with community service organizations.	4.6
d. engagement opportunities.	4.8
2. I encountered significant barriers to completing this service-learning activity.	1.8
3. Service-learning should only be integrated into senior course leadership.	2.4
4. Service-learning enables a positive change through leadership.	4.4
5. I was reluctant to participate in community and civic service-learning activities.	1.2
6. Service-learning is a community-building and democracy-building activity.	4
7. I plan to continue service-learning activities in the immediate future.	4.2
8. This experience embraced the concepts of reciprocity between learning and the community being served.	4.2
9. This experience allowed students to engage in activities that addressed community needs.	4.8

Table 3.

Student Responses of Definition of Service-Learning

Student responses (N=4):
Providing services to those in need while at the same time learning in your field of interest and having the ability to work with those less fortunate. It is a hand-on learning experience that, for me, was life changing and eye opening.
It is volunteering with doing something that you are in the field of doing or obtaining a degree in.
Service learning is a unique way of learning in and about a community and providing services for the betterment of a community. Service projects provide communities with people who are able to use their time, resources, and expertise in order to improve or help the community in which they are serving. At the same time, the people involved in the service project are learning from their experiences with the project.
Service learning is a volunteering project that is done to help the community in some positive way while the volunteer has the opportunity to broaden their own horizons by learning something new.
Utilizing skills and knowledge acquired in the classroom as a means to enhance the community.