Chapter 12

Service Learning for Inclusive Society in Malaysia: Driving Learning through Meaningful Experience

Roslinda Alias
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

Nor Aziah Alias
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

Johan Eddy Luanan
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

Harrinni Md Noor
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

Nurin Fatihah Rahenan
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Service learning is a method of teaching which combines classroom instructions with service to community. The provision of meaningful experience allows learners to drive their own learning. In the context of this study, service learning was used as an approach in increasing students’ awareness and inculcating positive attitudes towards persons with disabilities. This also aims to promote inclusive society by eliminating challenges faced by PWDs, namely social discrimination, lack of awareness and traditional prejudices. Thirty-three students from the Faculty of Education, Universiti Teknologi MARA were made as facilitators for a 3-day program involving the PWDs. The reflections provided by the students emerged into three themes, namely: 1) inculcation of positive attitudes and perceptions towards PWDs, 2) inculcation of awareness and knowledge on PWDs issues, and 3) other benefits. In conclusion, the experience gained by the students through service learning has been proven to be effective in their overall attitude towards PWDs, in the effort to promote inclusive society.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-1689-7.ch012
INTRODUCTION

There are many types of teaching strategies to be utilized in teaching and learning processes which could be categorized into two main classifications i.e. educator-centred teaching strategies and learner-centred teaching strategies. For the purpose of discussion, this paper will focus on the learner-centred teaching strategies that is experiential learning.

Experiential learning is not referring to teaching strategy by only simply providing learners with experience so that they can learn rather it is beyond that process (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Experiential learning is ‘the process whereby knowledge is created through transformation experience’ (Kolb & Kolb, 2009). Thus, educators should structure the experience so that the learners could learn properly (Gentry, 1990). One of the approaches in the experiential learning strategy is service-learning; which is the focus of the discussion.

Service-Learning

Service learning is rooted form the experiential learning theory (Seifer, 1998). It is defined as ‘a method of experiential education in which students apply what they learn in class to real-world situation by performing needed community service’ (Morgan & Streb, 2001).

There are many types of experiential learning approaches (or to be more general it is referring as experiential education approaches) and these including volunteerism, community service, field education, internship and service-learning (Furco, 1996). As presented in Figure 1, Furco (1996) clearly made distinction among these five categories of experiential education. And from the Figure 1.0, it could be inferred that service-learning is the balance approach in experiential education in which both recipient and provider benefit from the activity or programme that will be conducted. In addition, service-learning also has an equal focus in providing service at the same time gaining knowledge.

In addition, Bringle and Hatcher (1996) added that what makes service-learning different with the other experiential approaches is service-learning combines ‘community service activities with educational objectives’. Thus, it is suggested that community service should be thoroughly selected and coordinated with educational objectives so that it will benefits both learners and community involved (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000).

Figure 1. Distinctions among the five categories of experiential education
Adapted from Furco (1996)