



Service Learning/Field Experience Model of Success

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Service Learning Provides Opportunities for Reflection on Putting Theory into Practice

In 2010, Cuyahoga Community College's (Tri-C's) Associate of Applied Science degree in Early Childhood Education program received accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (NAEYCE, 2012). Early childhood programs earning accreditation are associate degree programs that demonstrate evidence of meeting NAEYC's Professional Preparation Standards. In meeting these standards, Tri-C reworked some of its courses, specifically the methods courses. These changes addressed inconsistencies surrounding the methods courses. Previously, these courses had differing credit hours and expectations for service learning. Four courses were revised to give similar titles and formats (two hours lecture, two hours lab). The courses now have identical credit hour and service learning requirements. These changes more clearly communicate the college's philosophy that all areas of development and learning are important. The change requires students to complete five hours of service learning during each of the four methods courses for a total of 20 hours. These methods courses focus on implementation in an integrated curriculum including art and creative expression, music and movement, math and science, and language and literacy, all of which are part of the Associate of Applied Arts in Early Childhood Education degree program. Service learning hours are in addition to practicum and student-teaching field placement hours and other volunteer or observational hours that students complete as part of the program's course work.

Service learning takes place in early childhood settings throughout the community. Students are able to arrange their service learning hours to fit their own schedules. Choosing a site on their own also provides the student with the opportunity to become familiar with a variety of early childhood education settings throughout the community including cooperative nursery schools, traditional preschools, and full-day childcare settings.

Implementation Date

Fall semester in 2011 - Present

How the Model is innovative and/or unique

Reflection about the experience is an important component of the model. After the experience, students focus on specific questions, which ask how the experience related to the student outcomes of the course, what during the service-learning experience was specifically eye-opening, and how the student was able to apply specific course material to the experience. In addition, the student is asked to reflect on what made them feel successful and why, as well as areas where they thought they needed more practice and why. Tri-C's aim is to support students in deeper reflection of their time in the field.

Indications of success

Students commented that the field experience was very helpful in practicing what they learned in the classroom. Students shared that they learned what worked and what did not and they were able to make adjustments. One student observed that she better understood that children will not always participate and that "bossing" a child into participating would not be an effective way to engage the child.

Service learning brought the classroom material to life for the students. The unpredictable moments and behaviors that children exhibited were proof to the students that it takes practice to master the art of facilitating learning experiences. One student commented that seeing the reaction and enthusiasm from children was rewarding and when children were not enthused she had the opportunity to use some of the strategies that she had learned in class to engage the children. This same student emphasized that she realized that being prepared and a "well planned story made a difference when holding the interest of children".

Another student reflected on his service learning with the following comments.

"I learned how to complete a storybook reading using the BDA (Before, During, After) format. Not only did I learn this valuable lesson, but was given numerous opportunities to practice in a classroom setting. Prior to this class, I did not know that there was a specific method for reading aloud to children.

Being in a classroom allowed me the opportunity to see the power of play in action. While observing the children, I could see them concentrating while working on puzzles, blocks, and games developing their cognitive skills and interacting during play developing their social skills. During storybook reading, I observed children predicting outcomes, building their vocabulary, and relating their personal experiences while engaged in the story demonstrating the building of language and literacy skills associated with this experience."

Service learning "generates emotional consequences, which challenge values and ideas (National Commission on Service Learning, 2012)" as indicated in this student's response, "*...before these service learning hours, I thought reading was just that; reading a story. I knew nothing about the BDA format, but now I know before you begin to read a story to children, you must first get the children's attention by introducing an object, get children to make a prediction, ask open ended questions to stimulate the children's minds, choose interesting words at the end, and ask why or what questions*".

One student emphasized the opportunity for reflection in this quote, "*The service learning assignment reinforced my understanding of this concept because it allowed me to plan and implement art experiences for young children and also to evaluate and reflect on my ideas, my strengths, and weaknesses. Through my communication, I was able to gain new/fresh ideas and have more understanding on their thoughts and interests. This will help in future planning.*"

How the Model is replicable

Since the service learning occurs in the community in a variety of settings and at times that fit into the student's individual schedules, the model is easily replicable. The experience is about the learning and the service is secondary. The students learn from the reflection that follows the service rather than from the service itself. The reflection process is easily replicable since it can take place in the form of writing, group work, or student presentations (Hilosky & Moore, 1999).

References:

- National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2012). Accreditation of Programs for Young Children. Retrieved September 1, 2012, from <http://www.naeyc.org/accreditation>
- National Commission on Service Learning. (2012). What is Service Learning, /PowerPont. Retrieved Sept. 1, 2012, from www.servicelearning.org/filemanager/download/153/what_is_SL.ppt
- Hilosky, A., & Moore, M. E. (1999). Service Learning. *College Teaching*, 47(4), 143.