Discovering new selves: College students’ perceptions of their perspective transformation through service-learning

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‘I never thought that life could be so hard before I met the friends here… I feel shameful when comparing this with the way I am living… I wish to be able to do something for them to ease their burden!’ (Ruth)

In Ruth’s story,
I experienced the power and impacts of service-learning.
I heard a student’s little voice putting her previous worldviews under question.
I witnessed how a student changed her perspective through service-learning.

Ruth’s story has thus pulled out my story and many other moving stories…
Perspective Transformation

‘The emancipatory process of becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships, reconstituting this structure to permit a more inclusive and discriminating integration of experience and acting upon these new understandings. ‘（Mezirow, 1991, p. 14）
Service-Learning & Perspective Transformation

- Previous studies on perspective transformation through service-learning agreed that students involved in service-learning have gone through significant changes in their attitudes and perspectives.
- Almost all the studies were conducted in the USA.
- The methodological limitations might have confounded the study results.
- There are very few studies on perspective transformation through integrated service-learning conducted in Taiwan.

- Eyler & Giles (1999)
- Kiely (2004; 2005)
- Tobias (2013)
- Lin (2008)
This narrative research sought to find out how college students perceive the process of their perspective transformation through service-learning.
Research Methods

- From a social constructivist perspective, holding that knowledge is co-constructed through a process of inter-subjective meaning making and story-telling, I adopt a qualitative narrative approach to the research.

- The data were co-constructed between the researcher and 9 participants using a semi-structured in-depth interview approach.

- Interview data were analysed using the holistic-content and the category-content approaches proposed by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998).
# Service Institutions and Target Population

## Table 1. Service Institutions and Target Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (Pseudonyms)</th>
<th>Service Institutions</th>
<th>Target Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>Happy Mount</td>
<td>Persons with disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Da-Shun Charity Organization</td>
<td>Elders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cathy</td>
<td>St. Anne’s Home</td>
<td>Persons with disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doris</td>
<td>St. Anne’s Home</td>
<td>Persons with disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calvin</td>
<td>Down Syndrome Foundation</td>
<td>Persons with disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eve</td>
<td>Tung-Jen Hospital</td>
<td>Elders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Tung-Jen Hospital</td>
<td>Elders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>Huashan Social Welfare Foundation</td>
<td>Elders living alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>Huashan Social Welfare Foundation</td>
<td>Elders living alone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Four-Stage Service-Learning Process

- **Preparation**
- **Implementation**
- **Assessment/Reflection**
- **Demonstration/Celebration**

**Core Elements**
1. Collaboration
2. Reciprocity
3. Diversity
4. Learning-Based
5. Social Justice Focus

Source: Fertman, White & White, 1996
Results and Discussion

(1) Crossing boundaries

We were afraid that we might not be helpful to them. We worried that they might not be interested in the activities we had prepared or felt bored. We were very much afraid in the beginning… (Jane)
Results and Discussion

(2) Dissonance

At the first time when we went there, we noticed that some of them could not even talk. Like little babies—maybe a little bit bigger, yet like others, they also had shovels in their hands and tried to dig holes as much as they could in order to plant trees and flowers...I was somehow moved by the efforts they had made... At the second time, I never thought that they could still remember our names...This made me think that they are really very much attentive...And when making soap, they also did it in a very careful and collaborative way... (Calvin)
Fr. Beunen established a foundation to take care of the orphans and abandoned children. Being a foreigner, he was so kind to us. How about ourselves? Shall we not also show concern for our own people? (Laughter) --We should care for one another! (Cathy)
(4) Connecting

Actually what they need is to have someone to talk with, otherwise the house is so… Of course, they have friends. But the house is so empty except if they go out to look for their friends. I felt sorry for them when seeing them living this way. I even felt guilty at the time when we were about to leave their house… (Jenny)
(5) Intent to change

Actually I had been very much afraid of dealing with the elderly. But after the service-learning experiences, I began to feel an urge to interact with them. Since then, I try to ring them from to time just to say hello to them and go home every weekend just to be with them. (Amy)
Conclusions and Recommendations

The research results indicated that crossing boundaries, dissonance, critical reflection, connecting, and intent to change are the five factors perceived as essential in the process of perspective transformation through service-learning.

Based on the findings, I would like to argue that dissonance is a crucial factor that activates the process of perspective transformation.
Conclusions and Recommendations

1. Recommendations for the promoters of service-learning:
   - To pay more attention to students’ dissonance experiences
   - To vitalize the reflection scheme

2. Recommendations for future research:
   - To examine the long-term effects of service-learning through longitudinal studies
   - To explore the process of perspective transformation through different types of service-learning
~ The End ~

Thank You for Listening!