Community-Based Education Pedagogy and Social Interaction

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Abstract

This paper is about the effects of integrating community outreach activities into school & university curricula as a creative student-centered pedagogy. Social interaction is manifested through a domestic exchange of services between dynamic students as giving individuals and their surrounding marginalized communities, the receivers. These social bonds are intended to build a community block that is solid and rich in welfare favoring underprivileged groups. Consequently, given the determination to implement such an endeavor under the supervision of the school or university, not only students will learn-by-doing and acquire various competencies from helping others in need under an academic umbrella, but also the rich-poor gap shall diminish over time with commitment and sustainability. In the end of a continuous learning process from practicing social work, the positive result is a mutual win-win social interaction between pupils or learners and the poorer communities that surround their school/university.

Introduction

This paper discusses social interaction and personal returns of incorporating community-outreach activities[1] as a learning pedagogy into the curriculum of all disciplines, which constitutes the practical aspect of a course whether at school or in university. In many developing, third world countries[2] such as most nations in Africa and Latin America -also considered as countries of the global south[3]- and even in the BRICS[4] (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), poor districts are not far from rich neighborhoods or are adjacent to academic institutions. Community-based pedagogy[5] is a fruitful outreach program by the academic community due to a sense of social responsibility and solidarity towards marginalized groups, especially that "[i]nteraction is a crucial means of establishing and maintaining relationships with others" (Holmes 2015:77). This process is about providing the poorer communities surrounding a school or a university with the needed services in the form of a group-project that is planned and implemented by students in the same course; school pupils and university students get trained to provide aid through a service-oriented learning process that is prescribed in courses' syllabi and could be applied to any academic discipline[6]. Examples of possible free services are: tutoring illiterates, giving psychological support, providing awareness sessions on:hygiene, first aid, cooking and healthy life habits or teaching afternoon lessons on difficult subjects such as physics or chemistry. Under a community-based educational approach, on the one hand, there is a transmission of free services by students according to their academic specialization.

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[1] http://edglossary.org/community-based-learning/

[2] https://www.investopedia.com/terms/t/third-world.asp

[3] https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_regional_classification

[4] http://brics.itamaraty.gov.br/

[5] http://edglossary.org/community-based-learning/

[6] https://www.aacu.org/leap/hips

For instance, medical students could provide medical support, psychology learners could support psychologically or agriculture learners could help with irrigation and construction engineers could help with building and restoration of houses and schools. On the other and in return, those involved learners encounter real life situations leading them to acquire practical hands-on-trainings in their academic disciplines, experience humanitarian work and develop various skills. Finally, the result is a win-win situation. A healthy social block develops forming a solid cooperative society, leading in the end to the well-being of all individual citizens in a nation given that as stated by Pica (1993:133) "curriculum can no longer be viewed as a series of products, but must instead be considered an ongoing process of social interactions". The goal of this paper is to provide a valid structure for possible research on social interaction in the discussed context of socio-academic environment and community-oriented learning. [7]

1.   Community-based learning approach benefits of fostering learners' personalities and competencies

Young learners' participation in on-campus community engagement activities does not only support marginalized communities to grow, but also help students to acquire soft and hard skills. Acquired best-practices that learners gain out of this community engagement or community-based pedagogy are learning to be: proactive, productive and actively continue to engage in community-based initiatives even after graduating from school or university.

1.1 Active versus passive learning

The importance of this section, is that active learning contributes the most to social interaction, because of the outcome of proactive learners, who think critically, solve problems and take decisions independently, as will be discussed next. Under this promoted learning pedagogy called *community-based approach* as an integrated part in a course syllabus, learners are required to take their sense of responsibility towards their fellow needy citizens. This act promotes the *student-centered learning approach*[8] (instead of the *teacher-centered pedagogy*[9]), because the former learning process requires the learner to do research beforehand in order to find solutions for the problems encountered by this marginalized social group. So by doing research, students learn how to: search for an information independently, think critically to find it and analyze what has been found, "la tradition cognitiviste a longtemps considéré l'apprenant comme un sujet épistémique" (Py 1991:147). All those steps require trial and error, asking questions, sometimes working in a team, which in the end leads to acquiring various competencies such as:brainstorming, setting objectives within a specific timeframe, designing, dividing responsibilities among group members, implementing a plan, assessing and evaluating results. By repeating those skills, a learner would reach optimal individual/team performance advocating the 'mind as a replay machine' " (Psathas & Anderson 1990:77). The learner will acquire tangible hard skills as well as intangible soft competencies due to the active participation and practical learning by-doing as a result of the discussed *student-centered learning approach* (the bottom-up track) substituting for memorization. Rote learning happens when the information is given by the instructor (top-down passive learning approach). So the student receives it without questioning the that information and is asked to memorize it rather than deeply assimilate it, hence "perhaps it is our responsibility as educators to teach students about the world they live in while we teach" (Pica 1993:129) . In conclusion, the student passes through a transformation phase where s/he learns to: think critically, get experiences directly from the field (accessing the needy and solving their problems), acquire problem-solving techniques and gain confidence "of how social interaction is organized on a moment-to-moment basis" (Hall, Hellermann & Pekarek Doehler 2011:6).

1.2 Integrity, social duty and lifelong learning

Every academic institution is committed to investigate the domestic and regional social hindrances then use innovative and appropriate capabilities in order to: face these challenges, influence the society positively, reflect on the results of its decisions as well as continue providing learning opportunities to foster learner's personal and professional development.

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[7] https://www.aacu.org/leap/hips & http://edglossary.org/community-based-learning/

[8] http://edglossary.org/student-centered-learning/

[9] https://education.cu-portland.edu/blog/classroom-resources/which-is-best-teacher-centered-or-student-centered-education/

Each academic institution (school or university) is advised to integrate the suggested community-based outreach pedagogy as a vital part in every course's curriculum, "the organization of interaction through which the learning is largely done" (Sacks 1992:xIvii). In other words, all courses' outputs should consist of teaching the subject theoretically as well as practically by involving learners into the field with their instructor(s) in order to implement a project of benefit that enhances a wider marginalized community, a positive "social presence (that is, consciousness and awakeness)" (Schegloff 1968:1089). This project shall be a source of lessons-learned, best-practices and acquired skills for those students. Learning to have empathy for others in need produces compassionate and proactive learners with a sense of duty and giving, since "[t]he greater the degree of empathy between the speaker and addressee, the less need there would be for verbal specificity" (Pica 1993:99). Thus lifelong learning is enhanced and by consequence one's knowledge and sense of giving producing a dynamic cycle of positive social interaction.

2.   Community-based learning approach benefits of promoting learners' sense of responsibility & civic participation

This positive social interaction setting of learners offering services to their surrounding needy in return for gaining experiences from the field should influence policy-makers. Therefore, actors who look for a peaceful life would rather design proper policies to contribute to the concepts of community engagement[10] and responsible citizenship[11] as a best-practice in terms of social interaction and an act of civic participation.

2.1 Education program leading to responsible citizenship

A good education will encourage its students to become effective citizens through teaching learners how to be: proactive, aware of their society's ranking and positioning regionally as well as internationally, ready to adapt to the fast advancing technology in light of nowadays knowledge-driven economies. The social interaction that takes place between a student and a marginalized person, could benefit that person by receiving a needed service, but does for sure ameliorate the student's psychology, self-esteem, positive thinking and sense of belonging to his/her society given "that interaction is fundamental to social life" (Hall, Hellermann & Pekarek Doehler 2011:1). This reflects the win-win situation for the giver and the receiver, a social interaction that is taking place in a specific context of an academic setting given that "[e]ducation for responsible world citizenship is the solution to our most pressing human problem" (Pica 1993:116) In other words, fellow needy citizens receive a free service by learners, who through such actions benefit as well, not only by building skills as discussed above, but also due to feeling good about themselves. This act of civic participation is reciprocal, because learners' personal well-being gets boosted psychologically and morally being influenced by the smile and words of appreciation by their fellow needy citizens receiving help.

2.2 Education program leading to reaching out one's community

It is important that education at school and university promotes ideas of belonging and dignity putting into consideration "the diversity of interactional behaviours that newcomers need to learn to smoothly integrate into a new" setting (Holmes 2015:87). Each citizen should be as concerned as the government about how to alleviate poverty in one's society, the increasing rich-poor gap, in addition to, how to reach quality education. The sense of responsibility towards one's society should be rooted since childhood, as a pupil at school. No only but also tolerance and acceptance of diversity are core values, for instance "the minority community acquires the language of the host community for survival purposes" (Pica 1993:56). Finally, in light of the discussed community-oriented learning environment, the influences of social interactions in a community are positive, moreover "research has shown that learners' participation in negotiation provides them with important opportunities and experiences for comprehension" (Pica 1993:446). To conclude, citizens and different social classes accept each other and live in harmony

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[10] https://sustainingcommunity.wordpress.com/2012/04/07/types-of-community-engagement/

[11] http://www.responsiblecitizen.co.uk/being-a-responsible-citizen.html

Conclusion

To conclude, as discussed learning to provide services –such as teaching illiterates or providing first aid sessions or planting trees in deserted areas- to one's surrounding community of needy co-citizens enriches social interaction in a nation as a whole. The discussed community-based pedagogical cycle is an example, which produces active learning. It produces proactive citizens and makes their society flourish both socially and economically. The outcome on the societal level is a mutual exchange of optimistic emotions between two or more social groups of one country (the learners as givers and their surrounded poor communities as receivers of free services). Such humanitarian actions and reactions turns into a constructive experience for both parties that is full of tolerance, giving, understanding and gratefulness. This is due to university administrators, instructors, learners and needy-community leaders (social status) undertaking of proactive social roles by helping fellow citizens who are less privileged. Students, in particular, gain practical life experiences that are of personal and professional benefits, acquire cognitive capabilities due to learning to think critically as well as creatively and subsequently learn to become effective citizens. Finally, such a collaboration produces a healthy society as elaborated in this paper.

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