Project Summary

Title: Assessing Student Learning Outcomes as a Result of Community Service

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This project focused on assessing student learning outcomes as a result of community service learning in two Secondary Education English classes, SEU 321 and SEU 390/391. Students in these classes attended ESL classes (in their choice of three different counties) for twenty hours in SEU 321 and for 4.5-5 hours in SEU 390-391. They were assessed on three objectives: (1) developing and utilizing various instructional strategies to reach students in the classroom more effectively, (2) gaining confidence in teaching in a classroom setting, and (3) identifying the unique needs of ESL students and their family members.

Utilizing a card sort, three open-ended surveys, and a reflection paper, findings of this service learning project indicate that all students participating in the study [11 students – 7 from SEU 321 (Methods), 3 from my section of SEU 390/391 (Practicum), and 1 from a colleague’s section of SEU 390/391 (Practicum)], expanded their definitions of literacy from a more autonomous definition of literacy (i.e. the theory of E.D. Hirsch), to a more inclusive definition of literacy (i.e. the theory of Paolo Freire) after attending literacy center visits. They also expanded their definitions of community from a more homogeneous, relational concept of community to a more heterogeneous, geographic concept of community.

At the end of the study, students demonstrated increased comfort working and teaching ESL students in an educational environment, including learning more general strategies to teach ESL students and an increased understanding of the ESL community and its needs. Based on the findings of this study, students’ learning experiences were heightened when they were coupled with the study of literacy and community in coursework and in-class discussion of those topics. Findings also suggest that students who participated more and took an active role in the ESL classroom learned more from the experience than those who observed and took part as needed.

As a result of the findings, both classes will continue making literacy center visits. Methods students will do so on a voluntary basis to fulfill educational experience service hours and practicum students will do so on an involuntary basis as part of their coursework. Overall, the community service experience works best in the practicum classroom as it can be coupled with coursework more easily. Despite the short amount of time (4.5-5 hours) spent in the ESL classroom, students in the practicum class demonstrated the same, if not more, understanding of literacy and community than students in the Methods class (10-20 hours) as it was coupled with coursework and discussion in class. As this project was also completed in another course outside my classroom, it also demonstrated that the service learning model can be duplicated with success in classrooms outside my own.

For additional information or the full report, please contact: pokorny@kutztown.edu