

Sustainability of Service-Learning Projects——a Case Study of SCU

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1. ABSTRACT & KEYWORDS

Long-chi Village is in the stricken area of 2013 April 20th Lushan earthquake which occurred in Ya' an, Sichuan province, China. It is estimated that the direct economic loss caused by this earthquake is roughly 42.26 billion and now it is facing a serious extinction crisis due to the shortage of labor force, fund, etc. Aiming at revitalizing the village, the Service-Learning Research Club of Sichuan University carried out a series of projects, from which ways are explored to promote the sustainability of Service-Learning projects.

Keywords: Service-Learning, Sustainability, The Service-Learning Research Club of SCU, Promotion

2. INTRODUCTION

This paper introduces The Service-Learning (SL) Research Club of Sichuan University (SCU) and a project conducted by the club. It lists the success and deficiencies and illustrates the development and sustainability exploration of the club. Then three ways are explored to promote the sustainability of Service-Learning projects in universities by sharing experience from this case.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

SL originated in the United States in the early 1980s. It is an “experiential education in which students engage in community service activities to achieve desired learning outcomes” (Jacoby, 1996). Researches of SL projects are mainly divided into two groups. One is the experimental SL activities which are conducted in schools or communities. For example, community volunteer services launched by Fu Jen Catholic University in Taiwan (Fu Jen Catholic University. n.d) The other one is the professional SL conducted in communities aiming at helping students to get professional knowledge and practical experience as well (Morton

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& Troppe, 1969). For instance, the physiotherapy SL program of University of Indianapolis (Indianapolis University. n.d). By analyzing the strong-points and the shortages of the Longchi, Ya' an project conducted by the club in SCU with the latter model, three ways are concluded to promote the sustainability of SL project.

4. METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

The program in Long-chi Village is a pioneering SL practice and exploration conducted by Sichuan University. The SL program of Long-chi Village bases on community needs and implements all the steps of SL. The students launched a variety of SL activities in the village, including the establishment of the Longchi village SL base, the investigation of the basic information in Longchi village, the operation of free clinic for the elderly and the conduction of the “Bee Project” (including crowd-funding, buying bees, guiding beekeeping, perfecting contracts, gathering and selling honey, etc.). Among these activities, the “Bee Project” has the longest duration, the largest number of participants and investment, and the most significant benefits for the teachers, students and villagers involved.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It has been proved that this comprehensive SL program of Long-chi Village could lead to a win-win situation. Students' responsibility and service awareness have been greatly enhanced and the situation of community has been dramatically improved. Meanwhile, from this case study, three practical measures are explored to promote the sustainability of Service-Learning projects.

5.1. Matters have been conducted in the project

- 1) The project launched a bee-keeping crowd-source funding, which has raised up to 32465.27RMB. With this funding, 18 families can keep 42 more boxes of bees to increase their incomes.
- 2) The project has successfully conducted health screening on 42 villagers and has established their personal health information files as well.
- 3) All the surveys on family information of the whole 18 local families has been completed.
- 4) A complete aerial map of Longchi village has been obtained, with which, a risk-avoiding map has been drawn.
- 5) Successfully undergone a collecting and collating process, one brochure about local village culture has been compiled and three public media platforms on Service-Learning, hit over 8000 times, have been established.

5.2. Problems lying in the project

- 1) The sustainability of the programs is not strong enough. The project was suspended one year later.
- 2) The enthusiasm for this program is decreasing among students. The number of members participating in this case has reduced from more than a hundred to less than twenty.
- 3) Lack of communication between various platforms.

5.3. Efforts to against the problems

- 1) Establishing the Service Learning Research Council of SCU and training qualified students to guide each sub projects.
- 2) Encouraging and guiding students to participate actively in this program and maximize their benefits.
- 3) Taking advantages of new media ' s platforms to establish a communication system among governments, NGOs, universities and so on to share information.

All these countermeasures contributed to promote the sustainability of this case in SCU and can also serve as an example to promote the sustainability of Service-Learning project.

5.4. Measures to promote the sustainability of SL projects

On analyzing the reasons of the big success and the countermeasures to solve the existing problems, following are some measures to promote the sustainability of SL projects. The measures can be divided into three parts. The first one is the carrier - team, the second one is the guiding ideology - adjustment, and the third one is the innovative mode - SL plus the Internet.

- 1) The carrier - team

Cooperation among schools, enterprises and communities is a must. For one thing, students are vigorous and imaginative. They can propose passionate and original notions, but they are deficient in experience. For another, communities are affluent in experience. But they sometimes may be blinkered and not able to come up with new solutions. Additionally, with enterprise's sponsoring, the results of Service-Learning activities might be ameliorated. In this process, students can solidify their theoretical knowledge and improve practical ability, communities can get human resource and intellectual support, and enterprises can be propagandized by the project thus improve themselves.

The advantages of team cooperation to promote the sustainability of SL project can be examined in the SL Research Club of SCU. In the project mentioned above in Long-chi, Ya'an, students from SCU cooperated with both the community of Long-chi and the honey enterprises. In this process, students learned how to manage a team and enhance their ability to communicate and

negotiate, communities helped farmers become richer and enterprises made profits. By this way, the sustainability of SL project can also be promoted.

2) The guiding ideology - integration

Another aspect to promote the sustainability of SL is integration. When promoting the sustainability of Service-Learning, students should be the contributors and erectors of their own hometowns. Also, great significance should be attached to being established to places and adjusting to local conditions.

The main reason for the success of the program lies in its integration. Rather than focusing on improving one aspect of the community condition, the program aims to provide comprehensive service to the target village according to its actual needs, which has successfully improved the village' s condition and the sustainability of the SL projects.

3) The innovative mode - SL plus the Internet

The “Internet plus” refers to the application of the Internet and other information technology in conventional industries. The Internet plus form can be used for reference and thus an innovative mode - SL plus the Internet can be created.

From the case mentioned above, students from SL Research Club in SCU helped the local farmers in Long-chi, Ya ’ an raise bees and sell honey via the Internet. By taking advantage of The Internet, SL programs gain new vigor and vitality and can be done in a more efficient way, leading to a win-win situation for both farmers and students. And the sustainability of SL can be promoted in this process.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The given case in Ya’an, Longchi shows it success and countermeasures in promoting the

Sustainability of SL project. It also illustrates how it helps the communities in a wider range and more effective as well as promoting the students’ professional skills and sense of civic responsibilities. More importantly, by taking the case study as an example, three practical measures are explored to promote the sustainability of SL, which are suitable for all SL projects.

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