

Developing Social Work Values Through Service Learning

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Experiential Learning in Social Work Education

- ✍ **Humanistic & democratic model of education.**
- ✍ **Philosophies of John Dewey, Jane Addams & Michel Foucault.**
- ✍ **Emphasizes importance of human rights & needs within relationships.**
- ✍ **Prepares learners to respect, respond & find meaning in life experiences.**
- ✍ **Focus on integrating subjective experience with objective knowledge.**



Research Question

How does participation in a service learning course impact master of social work students' personal and professional value development?



The Camp

✍ Who is this camp for?

- ✍ Any child hospitalized in a Georgia burn unit for at least 4 days qualifies (approx. 100 children).
- ✍ Ages 5-18.

✍ Who runs the camp?

- ✍ Georgia Firefighters Burn Foundation.
- ✍ Burn unit medical personnel, emergency service professionals, adult burn survivors.
- ✍ All volunteer funded, run and administrated.



The Course

- ✍ **MSW students spend 8 days at a camp for 100 burn-injured children.**
- ✍ **Campers range in age from 5-17.**
- ✍ **Camp is volunteer staffed, funded and administrated.**
- ✍ **Most of the volunteers are firefighters and medical personnel.**
- ✍ **Volunteer tasks include cabin counselors, support crew, maintenance, kitchen duty, security.**

The Students/Participants

 **22 First year Master of Social Work students.**

 **2 males, 20 females.**

 **ages 24 – 40.**

 **2 MSW graduates (female).
functioned as supervisory
assistants.**



Data Collection

- ✍ Student journals.

 - ✍ Daily entries.

 - ✍ Personal reflections regarding impact of camp experience as a learning opportunity.

- ✍ Focus groups.

 - ✍ Two groups conducted after camp experience to assess utility of service learning as a pedagogical approach.

- ✍ Course evaluations.

 - ✍ Open-ended questions.

 - ✍ Confidential.

Data Analysis

- ✍ Utilized constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).
- ✍ Validity and reliability safeguarded by:
 - ✍ **Triangulation of data through multiple sources and multiple methods.**
 - ✍ **Peer examination with second author.**
 - ✍ **Member check with students/participants to see if findings “rang true.”**
 - ✍ **Rich, thick description in reporting the research.**

Limitations of the Study

- ✍ **Students/participants may have been inclined to report positive experiences since service to others is a cornerstone of the social work profession.**
- ✍ **They may not have been completely candid in their assessment of the value of the service-learning experience, even though they were told that participation in the study was completely voluntary and would not affect their course grade.**
- ✍ **Small sample size of this primarily qualitative study limits generalization of the findings in a statistical sense.**



Findings

- ✍ Learning about the Professional Self.
 - ✍ Deepened integration of social work values.
 - ✍ Heightening a sense of community.
 - ✍ New ways of thinking about social work, self, and others.
 - ✍ Embracing a social work identity.
- ✍ Learning about the Personal Self.
 - ✍ Finding one's place.
 - ✍ Discovering strengths & abilities.
 - ✍ Unmasks misconceptions & stereotypes.
 - ✍ Challenges one's personal, professional, and societal values.



Professional Value Development

- ✍ **Examines the interrelationship between personal and professional values.**
- ✍ **Expands understanding of service.**
- ✍ **Broadens understanding of social justice.**
- ✍ **Deepens understanding of relationships.**
- ✍ **Deepens understanding of the dignity & worth of the individual.**
- ✍ **Promotes professional development & self-efficacy.**



Service

-  I have learned so much about utilizing strengths, pooling resources, and working as a team by working with the dedicated members of this camp family.
-  It is amazing--the work and pooling of resources that goes into this camp. It gives me a sense of how communities could potentially work to improve their services to others.



Social Justice

Tonight in our focus meeting I shared some things I don't usually share with just anyone. Afterwards S. & I had a long talk and I asked her to share about her homosexuality with me to help me understand her worldview better. It was tremendously helpful to me. Talking with her made me think of her as the person she is instead of simply lesbian.



Cultural Competence

While at camp, I felt as if we entered a completely different realm from the rest of society. We had to deal with sarcastic firefighters, horrible cafeteria food, roaches in the shower, crude jokes, severely burned children, and we had to live with each other for 8 days. Re-entry to the “real world” was quite difficult.



Developing Relationships

The whole interaction with the community—if the group doesn't really like us, how are we going to make this work---So cool! To really work it out and to work with real people who may not see us as social workers or like social workers.



Dignity & Worth of the Individual

We had water games today. It's a beautiful thing to see these children playing freely despite their scarred bodies and sometimes wounded hands. The smiles on their faces, joy in their smile and laughter in the air became contagious as the afternoon passed.



Personal Value Development

- ✍ Opening the mind to new ways of thinking.
- ✍ Insight and self-awareness.
- ✍ Social awareness.



Opening the Mind to New Ways of Thinking

The camp surprised me in its value because instead of teaching me how to work with children with special needs, it taught me about myself and gave me great insight into other student's hearts. By the end of the week, or the middle, really, the fact that the kids had burn scars was almost irrelevant. I learned more about myself and other students than I did about the children.



Self-awareness and Insight

I thought about my experience with my facial scar--how it destroyed my prior business arrangement with a modeling agency and yet, it didn't matter to me because I was so grateful to be alive. But after the plastic surgeries had healed, I gradually lost the awakened focus on life vs. appearance. These children are reminded of it daily and, in a sense, that's a blessing.



Social Awareness

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Learning Benefits

- ✍ **Pride in accomplishment of new tasks.**
- ✍ **Enhancement of self-confidence.**
- ✍ **Acquisition of networking skills.**
- ✍ **Enhanced insight/self-awareness.**
- ✍ **Confronting biases & prejudices.**
- ✍ **Developing conflict negotiation skills.**
- ✍ **New learning about burn-injured population.**
- ✍ **Enhanced professional identity development.**

Challenges for the Researcher

- ✍ Navigating multiple roles.
 - ✍ **Course instructor.**
 - ✍ **Researcher.**
 - ✍ **Participant/volunteer.**
- ✍ Bridging the gap between “town & gown.”
 - ✍ **Public relations.**
 - ✍ **Damage control.**
- ✍ Lack of peer support.



Implications for Social Work Education

- ✍ **Supports alternative learning experiences.**
- ✍ **Suggests ways to structure learning.**
 - ✍ **Provides challenging tasks in “real life” settings.**
 - ✍ **Opportunities to interact with people in new & unfamiliar milieus.**
 - ✍ **Emphasizes ongoing self-reflection & self-awareness.**
 - ✍ **Focus on group interaction and activities.**



Final Quote...

Burn camp has helped me really see how important experiential learning is to my professional, educational, and personal growth. I often feel uncomfortable spending so much time in a classroom learning social work.