Journeying with Communities: Theoretical Reflections From the Community Integration as Complex and Integrative Strategy for Teaching, Research and Community Development

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Abstract
Teaching and serving in a university setting is very challenging and yet very substantial. The role of faculty members is not merely teaching alone inside the classroom. There is a call to be an agent for social transformation. To be able to respond from this call, faculty members must be committed and equipped with knowledge, skills and values to be able to balance the role for teaching, research and service for the communities. These venues are not really totally separated from each other. In fact, they must be considered a packaged-venue to deliver the learning, knowledge generation and formation. The author's experiences for seventeen (17) years of serving the University of Santo Tomas through teaching, research and, community development, it is proven that these are complex and yet integrative for the full process of learning and serving. In fact, this kind of process really enriched the author's experiences for the integrative formation of students in terms of knowledge generation and serving the communities toward development. Partner communities had strongly benefits in the different processes. This paper generally described the journey of the author that impacted his personal and professional development gained from the different processes and experiences in community integration as complex and integrative strategy together with the different stakeholders involved:
• The immediate and substantial university departments/offices where the author is directly connected;
• The students as service learners and, partner researchers for development and empowerment and;
• The partner communities as substantial stakeholders for development and empowerment.

Keywords: Community Integration; Integrative Strategy; Teaching/Facilitation; Research; Community Development

I. Introduction

Teaching and serving in a university setting is very challenging and yet very substantial. The role of faculty members is not merely teaching alone inside the classroom. Among the faculty members in the university, there is a call and challenge to be an agent for social transformation. To be able to respond from this call and challenge, faculty members must be committed and equipped with knowledge, skills and values to be able to balance the role for teaching, research and service for the communities. These roles are not really totally separated from each other. In fact, they must be considered a packaged-role to deliver the learning, knowledge generation, formation and service to the communities and society at large.

The author's experiences for seventeen (17) years of serving the University of Santo Tomas through teaching, research and, community development and service has proven that these are part of complex and yet integrative full process of learning and serving. In fact, this kind of process really enriched the author's experiences for the integrative formation of students in terms of knowledge generation and serving the communities. Also, communities who are considered partners for community development and empowerment strongly benefits in the different processes. All stakeholders, in fact, have gained so much from all the processes of teaching, research and service. This three-pronged education mission is a total-packaged social arm of educational institutions, like UST, for social transformation engagement.

This paper generally describe the gained processes and learning from the experiences of community integration as integrative method of teaching, research and community development with all the stakeholders involved:
• The author as faculty, researcher and university community development facilitator;
• The immediate and substantial university departments/offices where the author is directly connected;
• The students as learners, researcher and servers for community development and empowerment and;
• The partner communities as substantial stakeholder for community development and empowerment.

The objectives of this research are the following:

General objective:
Develop theoretical reflections on the community integration as complex and integrative strategy for teaching, research and community development.

Specific objectives:
1. Lay down the development of mechanisms and opportunities of integrative strategy of teaching, research and community development based from the engagements and experience of the author;

2. Share the learning of the students, specifically the Bachelor of Arts in Sociology students, who underwent in their major courses and program in general;

3. Reap the gains and impacts of the community integration to the communities and to community development;

4. Come-up with recommendations on how to put forward the integrative method of teaching, research and community development.

Theoretical framework/literature review

Based from many literatures across many disciplines, integrative strategy or approach in education or teaching is tapping and developing many means that are creative and facilitative to be able to deliver and enrich the learning process and output of the learners. It goes beyond from the traditional approach and making way for liberating process of learning of the students and so, even with the teachers/professors who are facilitators in nature.

In this case, the paper will try to describe the process of learning and service process of the different stakeholders: faculty (author), students and, partner communities. The author of this paper, for seventeen (17) years, is a faculty member of the Department of Sociology and at the same time, a program staff-member and became assistant director of the University of Santo Tomas (UST) SIMBAHAYAN Community Development Office (community development and advocacy arm of UST). Students are mainly coming from the BA Major in Sociology of UST. The partner communities are mainly partner communities of the university and its different academic units in terms of its community development program.

The author as a faculty member of the Department of Sociology is tapping the approach of developing active engagement through the critical eye enhanced by sociological imagination and applying theories and concepts to one's experiences in the community, field or any sectors or groups in the society (Mills, 1959&2000; Freire, 1970&2005; Biklen, 1983; Alipao, 2002; Alipao, 2008). The author, prior to teaching in the university, has substantial years of deeper engagement in social actions and advocacies. The author is a faculty who is an advocate for social change, development and empowerment.   The life of the author can be related to the literatures that teaching is a subversive activity and always cultivating non-traditional culture of learning (Postman & Weingartner, 1969 and 1971; Thomas & Brown, 2009)

The students-learners are directly engaged and working with the poor, deprived, oppressed, exploited and, marginalized sectors or groups to study stereotypes, social inequality, and complexity of social realities (Ashworth, et.al., 2010; Dolgon&Baker, 2011), especially from and for the partner communities of UST in line with its community development program (Cruz, et.al., 2011; www.ust.edu.ph). Also, environmental and disaster risk reduction and management are concerns and needs that the community development program has deeper considerations and had actively responded to by the students and the university as a whole (Alipao, 2008; www.ust.edu.ph). Though the learning through teaching, researching and serving the communities are academic requirements and endeavors in nature, it stand as alternative and countervailing-structure as a distinct model, approaches and methods of pedagogy and learning (Freire, 1970&2005; DeFiore, et.al., 2005; Office of Community Engagement and Service. 2012; Diller, 2011; Dolgon&Baker, 2011).

On the other side, there are communities who are struggling are the concrete and real stage of development. The call for development must be measured in the grassroots level, in the midst of the life of people. Communities, either from its traditional sense like peoples who are in a specific physical and geographical locations or other forms of relationships among group of individuals, relationships that often crisscross and reinforce to one, sectoral and, individuals in multiple attachments (https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/community). Community development is an applied social science discipline, a development strategy and development program was influential to the different societal stakeholders to pursue development and empowerment (Manalili, 1991, 2012, 2017). Many educational institutions, like UST, adopted the perspective and strategy of community development since 2001 until to the present as its expression in community engagement.

Communities as partners of academic institutions in the pursuit of development in many angles of human and social development are ideal spaces for learning and developing students (https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu). In fact, community leaders and members are also considered as formators and facilitators for/of learning of students.

Thus, journey with communities thru genuine community integration is a service learning, in many expressions and processes, is one of the most vital and rewarding pedagogical tools that can be maximized that allows the students-learners, teachers-facilitators and communities to make real contribution for the development and empowerment of communities and to the larger society, using the knowledge and resources of sociology, community development and facilitative engagement processes (Mills, 1959&2000; Freire, 1970&2005; Biklen, 1983; Alipao, 2002; Alipao, 2008; DeFiore, et.al., 2005; Office of Community Engagement and Service. 2012).

Methods/analysis

This research had been conducted through personal narratives (but presented in third person in this case) because of the maximization of direct experiences of the author-researcher in attending his multi-roles in the university as a faculty, researcher and community development facilitator (https://atlasti.com/narrative-research/).

The research used and tapped different data collection methods:
Documents review: Reviewed the documents such as syllabi where the features and vital aspects of the two courses are stated (such as course objectives, contents, methods, strategies, requirements, expected outputs, and others). Concrete outputs of students-learners (such as program reports, research outputs, thesis in several academic years, theoretical reflections, and other outputs) were also re-read, reviewed, analyzed.

Field and personal notes on the practice of doing community development program in the university.

Thematic analysis: Through the information and data from the documents, vital features such as learning, insights, and theoretical reflections were gathered and

synthesized the highlights.

Theorizing: The author-researcher had theorized in terms of integrative strategy in teaching, intertwining with the research and community development engagements. Also, it reflects on the courses offerings, approaches, strategies, engagement models, and challenges.

II. Conclusions

This paper generally describe the gained processes and learning from the experiences of community integration as integrative strategy of teaching, research and community development with all the stakeholders involved:
• The author as faculty, researcher and university community development facilitator;
• The immediate and substantial university departments/offices where the author is directly connected;
• The students as learners, researcher and servers for community development and empowerment and;
• The partner communities as substantial stakeholder for community development and empowerment.

Through the support of different methods, results and discussion are the following points:
1. Author's prior experiences (1991 to 2002) before he entered in the academe (UST), he worked in the social action and advocacy of a certain diocese, networks of peoples, sectoral and community organizations, non-government organization (NGOs), churches and, advocates where he developed (personally and professionally) and exposed himself within complex realities and engagement in many ways and levels. In that development engagement, teaching (community education, trainings, facilitation and the likes), research and community development and organizing are integral component of socio-pastoral development work.

2. The author entered in the university in 2002. The author's experience for 17 years in the university had led him to intertwine the connections of teaching, research and community development. He entered in the university as a community development facilitator (program staff) of a newly formed UST Office for Community Development. The author assigned and initiated direct community organizing with indigenous peoples and communities (Ayta) in the municipality of Bamban (province of Tarlac, Central Luzon Region, Philippines). This was part of the whole plan to implement community development program with liberating and empowering dimension. This was also an expression to prove in the university that there were other strategies and means in working with communities.

3. After several months, the author became faculty member of the Department of Sociology where he handled several major Sociology courses and general sociology. Since sociology is a discipline very closed to communities, experiences of the author in community exposures and integrations became substantial method of the different major and general sociology courses he handled and thought.

4. The author continuous to serve in UST Office for Community Development (from 2002 until 2012) and UST Simbahayan Community Development Office (UST SIMBAHAYAN) (from 2012 until to the present) while holding a position of being a faculty member of the Department of Sociology (from 2002 until to the present). In January 2015, the author was appointed as the Assistant Director of UST SIMBAHAYAN. He is currently holding the said position.

As part of the UST SIMBAHAYAN, he directly supervise and assist student organizations in conceptualizing, developing and implementing community development projects in the different partner communities and institutions of the university. He also take lead the office to ensure that there is a proper establishment of partner communities from opening and developing partnership, strengthening partnership and phasing/turn-over of partnership. He is responsible in maintaining and sustaining the organization of the partner communities and their *Samahang Kamanlalakbay*, UST's partner communities' organization (with central and community based-units). Over-all, just like with the mandate of the UST SIMBAHAYAN, the author stand as advocate of community development engagement in the university.

5. The author, as faculty member, developed the intertwining of teaching, research and community development engagement in several expressions. The students were beneficial in these processes. These are the following:

5.1. Teaching and facilitating the sociology major courses were conducted with concrete examples, cases and studies aligned to the theories, concepts and realities being discussed.

5.2. Students were being exposed to the concrete social realities through the following approaches:

a. Conduct of personal/group simple researches on social realities, problems and concerns (community investigation in their own community or preferred community or sector);

b. Interactions with partner community leaders who were visiting the university in several occasions and activities;

c. Attendance and participations in different fora/symposia, social mobilizations, conferences and advocacy activities within and outside the university; and

d. Community exposures (5 to 7 days) in selected or preferred communities or sectors. Substantial numbers of community exposures and the research outputs were valuable in the establishment of community profile, community situational analysis and program development;

5.3. Different social and sociological researches were being conducted and developed in different levels and through different methods (qualitative, quantitative, descriptive, evaluative, exploratory, case studies, phenomenology and others).

5.4. Many theses were conducted and delivered with the topics or themes under the community development or community engagement. Most of the theses were conducted in the partner communities of the university with the intention and objective of supporting the partner communities through researches (social or sociological analysis of the community situation; evaluation of community programs of the university or particular academic units; evaluation of community programs in the partner communities; explore possible programs and policies for development).

6. The author pioneered in teaching Service Learning Courses (Theory and Application) from School Years 2012 to 2016. This has been shared already during the Second International Conference on Service-Learning (December 2016).

7. Through tapping and maximizing integrative method, several policies were developed:
7.1. Coordination of and between different major courses agreed to implement one community exposure covering the different courses' objectives;
7.2. Community exposure and integration needs adequate wholistic preparations before the implementation;
7.3. Community exposure and integration is a good approach in exposing the sociology students to the social realities that are helpful in understanding the following:
a. Different sociological theories and concepts;
b. Understanding themselves as human persons;
c. Understanding the larger society and world and;
d. Continue to understand and quest for social transformation.

8. The author also engaging in research from an informal to formal means:
8.1. From School Years 2002 to 2013 and School Year 2015 to 2017, the author engaged in research informally. Meaning, researches output were conducted outside the different research centers of the university; and
8.2. School Years 2013-2014, 2017-2018 and 2018-2019, the author engaged in research formally. Meaning, researches output were conducted under the research center of the university.

Though there were informal and formal affiliations in terms of doing research, the objective of knowledge generation were utilized in teaching and serving the communities and partner communities.

9. Particularly for the partner communities as hosts or venues of community integration of sociology students and as main recipient of community engagement of the university, they have gained several outputs:
9.1. They have established community profile, situational analysis and program development studies;
9.2. They established closer link to the university because of deeper understanding of community needs and situations and led to the establishment of community development programs; and
9.3. They have deeper understanding of their situations and to their respective community/sectoral organizations.

10. There were several common problems encountered in the processes of community integration and how they were handled:

10.1. The students have different understanding on "what is and how is" community integration (community excursion; adventurism; "community visitation only"; or genuine concept of living and understanding with the people and community). There were orientations and courses' preparations before the community integration;

10.2. There were students who created "troubles" in the community. The students were accompanied by faculty members in the communities for continuous guidance and supervision. Policies were cleared and laid down to the students and parents/guardians before the integration;

10.3. Faculty advisers cannot always accompany their advisees in the field or community. Close coordination with the communities before, during and after the theses process were substantial in ensuring the safety of the students and their theses outputs; and

10.4. There were strict policies and requirements of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and university in terms of off-campus activities. There were instances that community integration or exposures did not push thru due to non-compliance or lack of requirements. The department is very strict in implementing the off-campus. This has been seriously implemented and followed by the department in the last four (4) semesters.

11. There were general opportunities and threats for the BA Sociology program in general and community integration in particular:

11.1. The new or first year college BA Major in Sociology students were the first graduates of Senior High School system can be considered opportunities toward better teaching sociology. But this can also be problematic because they are under the new curriculum of sociology. This batch has continuously experiencing as the pilot of new educational system. Community integration must be put in good phasing;

11.2. Generation of this new batch of students who are exposed to modern technology and social media must be encouraged to tap and balance their resources with sense of community, humility and, solidarity with communities; and

11.3. There is an opportunity to popularize and revitalize the discipline of sociology in the midst of neo-liberal economic policies and culture. The course must be felt by the students with convictions and know how to put in place in relation to larger society.

Contributions to theory and practice

Based from the reflections and narratives laid-down in this paper, teaching sociology with integration of research and community engagement and development has proven its non-traditional approach and liberating process for the students and communities' learning and empowerment.

The author (faculty member) is vital in the facilitation of liberating processes of learning and serving. Deeper understanding and living the principles and processes of learning and serving are equally vital to the output. All possible resources and opportunities to teach or to facilitate, to generate knowledge and to serve are must for the agenda of serving and learning. Substantial exposure to the liberating and subversive processes is vital for the facilitators of learning to become the same. "Walk the talk" as the saying goes must be felt.

Theories and concepts are vital but these can be sharpened by the direct practice, facilitation and, witnessing the processes of community integration as a way of teaching, research and community development. Based from the reflections, all stakeholders have equally learned and served in the process.

Acknowledgment

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