Unique Development of Community Based Learning in Economically Developing Nations
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Agenda
• Introduction
• Case Studies
• Reflections & Recommendations

Introduction
• Egypt is a third world developing country where there are many social issues and inequalities
• Available Literature on community based learning (CBL) practice and techniques are from within a Western context that is often not applicable to the Egyptian experience
The American University in Cairo is a leading private university in Egypt where most students come from an economically privileged sector of society. The body of students is well known for being civically engaged and thus the CBL experiences have been enhanced by the readiness of the students to participate in active learning.

As part of a civic engagement agenda, CBL classes have been lately introduced to The American University in Cairo’s psychology department. The experience has been unique as it has enabled students to encounter new learning experiences and allowed for more research in the untapped area of CBL.

Examples of incorporating CBL with psychology have been:
- Educational Psychology: in which students worked at the university’s daycare for a set number of hours/week and deeply reflected on their interactions within the daycare and the concepts learnt theoretically.
- Abnormal Psychology: in which students accompanied institutionalized patients at a mental health hospital and wrote reflections about their experiences.
Examples Contd.

– Personal Growth and Adjustment: in which several projects have been incorporated over different semesters like renovating wards at mental health hospitals and working with refugee populations
– Community Psychology: Over consecutive semesters students have carried out different projects with disadvantaged segments of society which will be next described in detail

Case Study 1: Introductory Community Psychology (CP)

• Students were paired with unaccompanied refugee minors and helped them find educational and social services
• Students wrote journal reflections on their experiences and how they relate to community psychology principles learnt
• The same group of students decided to continue with the service learning quest by putting together a larger project the next semester

Case Study 1 completed: Advanced CP: People with Disabilities

• Class was divided into two groups
• One group was more focused on research and data generation
• The second group was focused on acting and intervening based on generated data
• Some of the outcomes were
  – A draft employability program
  – Media guide & public service announcements
  – Quantitative data on attitudes towards people with disabilities
Case Study 2
Needs & Strengths Assessment of A’in El Seira

- Research was carried out to analyze issues of housing infrastructure and develop recommendations for future interventions
- Work was carried out in collaboration with the University’s Philanthropy office and an NGO
- Members of the community were involved in discussions and analyses

Case Study 2 completed: Housing in A’in El Seira

- The goal of this course was to build on the findings of the previous semester’s findings
- Attempts were made to create successful with construction companies and engineers to intervene with identified problems
- A Mini-conference was held to discuss results and future intervention plans

Reflections & Recommendations

- Action vs. Research
  - With the country’s economic situation, students and faculty are often faced with overwhelmingly complex situations/circumstances
  - The enormity of problems compel action that is not grounded by research
  - While the previous case studies have succeeded to incorporate research with action or practice, this is not common practice
  - Critical thought needs to be put in how to use research-guided practice, while the wealth of available literature is often not compatible with faced situations
• Hollism
  – Action or practice that is not guided by research often means being caught up in practice and overlooking learning from previous attempts
  – Lack of research leads to interventions that deal with the superficial symptoms of problems, and not the symptoms at the core of socio-economic issues witnessed

• Reflections & Recommendations
  • Sustainability & Evaluation
    – Shortcomings in research to properly evaluate situations often leads to providing services and failure to create sustainable change
    – Immense research and evaluation on intervention is required to be able to reach sustainable solutions that are effective and empowering

• Technicalities
  – Due to the country’s economic circumstances, resources and support from institutions (e.g. social services) is often absent
  – Techniques used for community based learning are not replicable
  – Thus a large comparative literature base needs to be generated on how to modify and learn from the Western experience and how to proximally use CBL
Conclusion

• There is a series of inter-related problems that require innovative and critical thinking, and more importantly a strong research base
  – Effectively pairing research with action
  – Effective evaluation of interventions
  – Sustainability of interventions
  – Technicalities of Community Based or Service Learning

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