The Positive Effects of Service Learning on Students’ Emotional Intelligence

I piloted service learning [SL] into my three CPD 150 classes (“Strategies for College Success”) Fall 2016 with hopes of integrating authentic educational experiences with real life applications that met the needs of both students and volunteer agencies in our community. Each student (N=91 beginning of the semester) was required to complete 20 hours of service learning during the semester. They chose from a list of 100+ agencies who partner with EMCC through our Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement. I collaborated with Landis Elliott from that center to encourage students to choose an agency that closely related to their career field or to a passion they held.

One of my goals in implementing SL was to enhance students’ **academic** **success** by integrating SL into the CPD150 curriculum. Emotional intelligence, according to the Cherniss and Goleman construct (2001) includes self-awareness and self-management; and social awareness and relationship management. By contributing to our society in a meaningful way doing service learning, students moved out of their comfort zones and built their communication, collaborative, and interaction skills (see post-assessment item analysis questions 2 and 3). As a result, they gained self confidence and self awareness; empathy toward others’ emotions, concerns and needs; and formed productive relationships through their interaction with their respective service agencies (see post-assessment item analysis questions 4-7). This level of teamwork helped form a sense of reciprocity between students and their agencies: 95% of the students strongly agree or agree that their service learning experience benefited both themselves and the agency they worked with (see post-assessment item analysis question #1). The feedback provided by the pre- and post-assessments and the respective agencies’ evaluations of the students at the end of their service learning, has provided measurable insight into the mutual benefits for both students and the agencies they served (see OPI Condensed Item Analysis Reports).

Allowing for meaningful reflection on the service learning experience is important to students’ personal feedback. For my students the requirement at the end of the service learning experience was to create a Prezi using photos as well as words to express their thoughts and reactions. This is what I required in their reflection (a graded final):

**Service Learning Slides** -

* Introduce and describe your service learning site. Use 3+ photos you have taken.
* Who does this organization serve? Why is their work important?
* Summarize your experience (20 hours). What role did you play? A memorable experience?
* How did your service learning relate to what you are learning in CPD150? Skills applied?
* What have you learned and gained from this experience? Who or what made the biggest impression on you during this experience?
* What did you like the most? The least? Was your service learning valuable?

The Prezi was an oral presentation for the class and invited guests. The Prezis were of a high caliber and allowed students to share what they had learned and experienced. Whether it was an awesome “ride-along” with one of our local law enforcement agencies or adopting a puppy from one of the many animal rescue agencies, students gained significant experience that added to both their personal growth as well as to their academic success and self-confidence.

Finally, the biggest take-away from the Post Assessment results was measurement of how transferable the CPD 150 skills that I taught were to the actual service learning. Of the eight skill areas listed in the post-assessment (decision making; time management; critical thinking; personality traits/personal style; skills, values and interests; career networking; and public speaking/presentation skills), **the top three areas** that had the greatest impact on students’ transferable skills were (1) time management, (2) skills, values, interests, and (3) personality traits/personal styles. In the other seven questions used in both the pre- and post-assessment, all mean levels were significantly increased (see pre- and post- item analysis reports).

In conclusion, my goal was to assess changes in students’ emotional intelligence as a result of their service learning experience. I found that not only did their attitudes, values, and concerns change, but also they gained measurable increases in their academic success due to the collaborations they formed with the agencies and the skill sets they refined and applied from their CPD curriculum.