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A SERVICE-LEARNING E-TUTORING PROGRAM FOR ROMANIAN PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS

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Abstract

The Service-Learning (S-L) pedagogy is an innovative, malleable and convertible curricular tool that can be efficiently adopted by any discipline, serving a wide array of academic, community and social goals. This paper describes the restructuring and extension proposal for PedTut, a previously developed S-L e-tutoring program for pre-service teachers, following the guidelines of a validated model for including S-L in higher education (CLAYSS, 2016) including multistep-stages (motivation, diagnosis, design & planning, execution, closure and celebration) and cross-sectional processes such as the reflection process, the record and communication process and the assessment process. The aim of the e-tutoring program was to develop and implement a S-L project designed for aiding novice pre-service students with online feedback on their pedagogical teaching practice regarding some methodological and psychological aspects of teaching, as well as the teaching experience as a whole. This study aims to restructure and extend the wireframe for the initial S-L program offered to pre-service teachers, at a national level, through e-tutorials, to enhance their pedagogical training for more accuracy and efficiency, as well as their civic responsibility, academic performance, subjective happiness and self-efficacy levels and to increase their workforce enrolment by easing their transition into the world of teaching practice.

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Keywords: Service-Learning, CLAYSS guidelines for SL in higher education, pre-service teachers.



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1. Introduction

Service-Learning (S-L) is a pedagogical concept that can be practiced within formal, non-formal and informal educational settings (CLAYSS, 2016), a „balanced approach to experiential education” that can be „distinguished by its intention to equally benefit the provider and the recipient of the service, as well as to ensure equal focus on both the service provided to the community and the learning that is occurring” (Furco, 2003). Due to the fact that S-L is a flexible educational approach that can bring mutual benefits to both the providers and to the recipients, as well as with multiple beneficial effects for the learners and for the community, there is an increased interest for such programs in the academic practice, thus the increased number of investigations into S-L in recent years (Eyler, 2000). S-L is widely chosen by educators due to its flexible, cost-effective nature and various outcomes on students. Hence, a meta-analysis of S-L programs (Celio, Durlak & Dymnicki, 2011) reveals that in 62 cases, in comparison to controls, students that took part in S-L projects showed statistically significant increases in the following outcome areas: attitudes toward self, attitudes toward school and learning, civic engagement, social skills and academic performance, and other benefits that include enhanced self-efficacy and self-esteem, increase in the favourable attitudes toward school and education, gains in positive social attitudes and social skills relating to leadership and empathy. This study describes the restructuring and extension proposal for a previously developed Service-Learning (S-L) e-tutoring program for pre-service teachers, i.e. PedTut (Rusu, Copaci & Soos, 2015), following the guidelines of a validated model for including S-L in higher education (CLAYSS):

Project Presentation: Restructured Wireframe for PedTut, the Service-Learning Project

Project title: PedTut (acronym for Pedagogical Tutoring)

School and institution: Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania (www.ubbcluj.ro)

Project coordinators: one higher education teacher, which is also the, Coordinator of Office for Students with Disabilities and a PhD candidate in Psychology domain (the first author of this study).

Other participants: (1) Pedagogy Students from the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania; (2) A member of the institutional board of the University.

1.1. Project categorization

According to the Centro Latinoamericano de Aprendizaje y Servicio Solidario, CLAYSS (2016), S-L projects can be categorized based on a series of articulation models, depending on how the S-L is articulated with the educational curricula. Therefore, a S-L project can be defined as a: (1) part of class activities, (2) as a part of course or school activities, (3) as a part of a multidisciplinary program involving classes and/or courses, (4) as a part of professional practice, (5) as a separate S-L course or (6) as a part of research project (graduate or post-graduate). The current project can be categorized as a Professional curricular articulation (postgraduate) where the PhD dissertation supports S-L research and gives the opportunity for commencing new projects. The project also has a research component (i.e. investigating the S-L associated variables and the service outcomes), addressing the social issue of increasing the workforce enrolment for pre-service teachers and enhancing their pedagogical experience and expertise in the field.

The project is based on the scenario in which academic knowledge was requested by the community of pre-service teachers' while taking qualitative job interviews and while collecting feedbacks during several exams. PedTut is also a social promotion project that targets mid and long-term goals to sustain pre-service teachers in their itineraries to become expert teachers and contribute further on by offering literacy and knowledge to future generations of children.

1.2. Extended goals and itinerary information

The aim of the initial tutoring program (PedTut 1) was to develop and implement a Service-Learning based tool in order to aid students enrolled in the second year of the Pedagogical Training Module with feedback on their online reflection of the pedagogical practice. The feedbacks were offered on the basis of frequently methodological asked questions or any other obstacle they might encounter during 3 weeks' period of their teaching practice. In the initial testing phase of the program, the tutor was impersonated by the researcher (who has graduated the Pedagogical Training module). In the extension phase of PedTut (PedTud 2), the role will be assigned to older students majoring in pedagogy, masters' degree students, as a service-learning experience. The tutor-students will not only offer online short tutoring guidance (as a part of PedTut I), but also short, 30-minutes theoretical workshops in e-tutorial video format, online, either via the PedTut platform or a similar hosting environment for online tutorials. Aside the developer of the program (i.e. the main author of the study) and a higher education teacher supervisor, other participants considered in the study are a back-end web developer for the implementation of the video e-tutorials and camera/filming crew.

Goals:

- Learning: Participative learning regarding teaching practice; In-depth learning of curricular contents; Learning about civic attitudes; Live experience of social responsibility, positive attitudes towards cultural diversity and community engagement.
- Service: (1) PedTut I - Online e-tutoring sessions offered by expert, older students to their younger, novice colleagues enrolled in the Pedagogical Training Module (i.e. pre-service teacher training program); (2) PedTut II - Providing online, e-tutorial study materials for peers: presenting short, essential and concise sessions on different curricular topics of general interest for pedagogy students and making them available to other students with the help of a filming crew & online upload.
- Actors: students and academic staff of the higher education institution; Recipients: the younger, novice pre-service teachers from the implementing HEI for PedTut I and the pedagogy community (nation-wide pre-service teachers) for PedTut II.

PedTut objectives: Enhancing the online educational Platform to host a Personal Reflection Journal for the tutees with feedback options for the tutors; Developing an online educational functionality for the PedTut program to also host embedded video e-tutorials and after-tutorial quizzes for PedTut II; Establishing the curricula, together with the student-tutors, for the video modules of PedTut II; Implementation of the e-tutoring and e-tutorial programs for an experimental sample of students; Testing the efficiency of the e-tutoring program and the e-tutorial videos; Evaluating the levels of subjective happiness, civic attitudes, interpersonal problem solving skills, appreciation of diversity, self-efficacy and

social desirability of the participants; Comparing the measured levels of civic attitudes, interpersonal problem solving skills, attitudes of diversity, self-efficacy, subjective happiness and social desirability of the experimental group with the control;

Duration of the S-L project: Three weeks, at the beginning of the second semester (i.e. the first semester of teaching practice) of the academic year.

2. Problem Statement

It is well known that, following the described itinerary of the S-L projects, at the root of every S-L initiative is an identified community problem that can be addressed through the framework. The community need that needs to be addressed in the context of the Babes-Bolyai University was identified in the diagnosis stage of the project. Student-for-student learning enhancement was chosen considering the priority-setting criteria. Therefore, PedTut focuses on facilitating access to education, tutoring and learning improvement for pre-service teachers in the context of their initial pedagogical training to enhance their pedagogical training and ease their transition into the world of practice. Thus, the initial developed project has now been reformed and divided into two sections: a first section (PedTut I) that focuses on enhancing the pre-service teachers pedagogical training with online e-tutoring sessions and the second section (PedTut II) that extends the latter at a national level by implementing a series of online pedagogical e-tutorials, accessible to pre-service students all around the country.

3. Research Questions

Hypotheses:

- After completing the e-tutorial (e-SL) program, there shall be a significant increase in students' levels of civic attitudes (civic actions, interpersonal problem solving skills and attitudes of diversity) from the experimental group compared to the students from the control group.
- After completing the e-SL program there shall be a significant increase in students from the experimental group of subjective happiness levels compared to the students from the control group.
- After completing the e-SL program there shall be a significant increase in the experimental group's self-efficacy compared to the control group.
- At national level, after completing the video e-SL program, there shall be a significant increase in their final national pedagogical exam and work field insertion for teachers.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the current study is to standardize a previously designed S-L program which addresses pre-service teachers' training by methods of e-tutoring and extend the latter at a national level, by methods of e-tutorials. The restructuring proposal and extension for the initial program following the CLAYSS (2016) validated itinerary stages and cross-sectional processes for S-L programs is presented in the following sections.

5. Research Methods

The following tables (Annexes 1-3) explicitly describe the steps undertaken for a complete execution of the PedTut programs, according to CLAYSS (2016) validated model for the inclusion of S-L in higher education. The tables present the stages of both PedTut I and PedTut II following the literature characteristics (Billing, 2000; Furco, 2003), itinerary and cross-sectional processes (i.e. the reflection process, the record and communication process and the assessment process) for S-L projects (CLAYSS, 2016). Contemporary literature divides S-L projects on stages, such as: preparation/diagnosis and planning (identifying the community need, establishing a goal and objectives for the S-L project, necessary skills, resources and activities), implementation (and maintaining the connection between the service and academic content), assessment (evaluating the course, and/or student academic, social or civic learning) and demonstration/celebration (discussing and exhibiting their work) (Jenkins & Sheehey, 2011; CLAYSS, 2016). Hence, each stage of PedTut I & PedTut II is exemplified accounting for the curricular contents linked to the service in the corresponding phase described above, together with an exemplification of the activities proposed for students' field work related to service and analogous learning components.

5.1. Diagnosis and Planning

This first stage of each S-L project aims at identifying real community needs that can be answered by students at educational institutions and at the same time, prospecting and selecting the best possible opportunities to develop meaningful learning (CLAYSS, 2016). Annex 1 presents the diagnosis and working proposal for PedTut I and II.

5.2. Execution

According to literature, this stage includes project implementation, feedback and monitoring mechanisms (CLAYSS, 2016) that are also presented for PedTut I & II in Annex 2.

5.3. Reflection

Reflection is a mandatory cross-sectional S-L process that allows students to become aware of the learning they are undergoing, state doubts and experiences, consolidate their leadership and make suggestions to educational institutions (CLAYSS, 2016). Reflection before, during and after the service is important due to the fact that it contributes to people changing their meaning schemes (concepts, beliefs and judgements) by refining or elaborating them together with the new information (Eyler, 2002). Annex 3 offers a detailed presentation of this cross-sectional process for PedTut I & II.

5.4. Closure and Celebration

This stage of S-L project is comprised of the closure assessment where the different stages, objectives that have been set at the beginning of the project, educational results of the experience, learning and the quality of the service are evaluated (CLAYSS, 2016). In the case of PedTut I & II, at the end of the projects, the above components will be discussed, and diplomas will be issued for the tutor-students offered during a Closure Ceremony. The celebration and official launch of the program will take place at the university, where current achievements, present the posters, future directions of research will be discussed

and project data will be disseminated. The curricular components are identical to those in the previous stages. The students' field work (service) will be team working for the preparation of a Closure Ceremony for poster presentations and diploma offerings, both speech-wise and setting-wise.

5.5. Systematization and Communication

The final systematization step will consist in reviewing and analysing the data collected and recorded during and after the program took place (both qualitative and quantitative), address the mistakes that might have been done during the program with future directions of improvement and disseminate the data by publishing a comprehensive scientific article, and participate in conferences. The data will also be included in a PhD thesis. After the systematization, the article will be published online for dissemination of data.

5.6. Assessment

The assessment of the extended version of the PedTut program will be conducted at the student and community level: student variables will be assessed using self-report questionnaires (such as the recently translated and linguistically validated in Romanian CASQ, Moely et al., 2002) and qualitative analysis of the journals. The following quantitative statistical analyses will be conducted in order to assess the programs' impact and test the hypotheses mentioned above: Person's Correlations, Independent Sample T-Tests, Reliability Analysis of the scales (Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient), Descriptive Statistics and an Effect Size Calculator (Cohen's d). At the community level, the tutees that enrol in the video e-tutorial will be presented with a short 5-question quiz after each module, and a final feedback on the program. Also, the design of the project will be assessed by the group of coordinators and the "module" objectives after each video lesson have been filmed.

6. Findings

After the completion of both PedTut S-L sections, we expect that students' attitudes towards diversity will increase, as stated and confirmed by previous findings (Rusu, Copaci & Soos, 2015). Also, the hypotheses that their civic action, interpersonal and problem-solving skills, subjective happiness levels, self-efficacy and performance will increase, easing their transition into the world of teaching practice, need to be further tested after the implementation of the current restructuring and extension proposal.

7. Conclusion

This study aimed to describe the restructuring proposal for PedTut, a previously developed Service-Learning (S-L) e-tutoring program for pre-service teachers, following the guidelines of a validated model for including S-L in higher education developed by CLAYSS (2016). The aim of the initial tutoring program (PedTut 1) was to develop and implement a Service-Learning based tool in order to aid students enrolled in the second year of the Pedagogical Training Module with feedback on their online reflection of the pedagogical practice, whereas PedTut II completes the previous by adding online pedagogical e-tutorials, restructured on the CLAYSS model (2016). We consider the model to be a first step towards a unified approach in implementing such programs in higher education, encouraging the inclusion of similar practices in core curricula. In addition, it is also a comprehensive guideline with tremendous utility in increasing

scientific rigorousness of S-L implementation in all higher education institutions, with positive outcomes in ecological validity, community engagement, academic learning, and community impact.

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Annex 1. Diagnosis and Planning Stage for PedTut I & II, CLAYSS Template (2016)

ITINERARY	CURRICULAR CONTENTS / CLASSES	ACTIVITIES PROPOSED FOR STUDENTS' FIELD WORK	
		LEARNING	SERVICE
Motivation: the need for a supplementary enhancement tool regarding the pedagogical training of pre-service teachers. The academic knowledge was requested by the community of pre-service teachers' while taking qualitative job interviews and while collecting feedbacks during exams. The structure of the project was discussed together with the project heads and student that previously participated in the testing phase. This type of S-L Project has the potential to be organized in any faculty, based on the needs of the students and to be up scaled online at national level, for all the pre-service teachers interested in the topic.	Classes connected to the SL activity: Class Management (1), Curricula of Primary and Preschool Teaching Education (2), Introduction to Pedagogy (3), Curricula of Teachers' Training Module (4), Social Work (5), Pedagogy of Play (6) (1) Elements of classroom management (1, 2). (2) Teaching design: operationalization of goals (2, 3). (3) Civic attitudes (4, 5). (4) Modern and traditional teaching methods (1, 2). (5) Using play in teaching (concepts from 2, 6). (6) Performance evaluation and curricula standards (1, 2). (7) From monodisciplinarity to transdisciplinarity (2). (8) Algorithms drafting an exam response: coherence, clarity, accuracy, consistency (2, 3).	Learning about the strategies of planning an action to respond to needs of younger colleagues in order to facilitate their participation to education and ease their transition into the work field. In-depth learning of concept presented in the curricular contents or classes column. Learning about S-L, participative learning of pedagogy concepts, civic engagement, enhancement of attitudes towards diversity.	Organizing e-tutoring sessions by older pedagogy students, for novice students, based on the needs signaled by previous pre-service students that took part in the pilot study (PedTut I). Organizing short video e-tutorial modules on different concept by older pedagogy students, for novice students, based on the needs signaled by previous pre-service students that took part in the pilot study (PedTut I).



Annex 2: Execution Stage for PedTut I & II, CLAYSS Template (2016)

ITINERARY	CURRICULAR CONTENTS / CLASSES	ACTIVITIES PROPOSED FOR STUDENTS' FIELD WORK	
		LEARNING	SERVICE
<p>The S-L event I (PedTut I) had duration of 3 weeks. The initial platform was constructed as an online reflection tool. Students had to answer a short reflection diary, once a week, after the class they taught. The diary items were related to situations encountered during practice: positive experiences, difficulties, conflicts, problem-solving strategies they used, alternatives they used, worry thoughts and a text area field where they could ask for advice on methodological issues. Diary was individually completed 3 times, during the first 3 weeks of practice. In maximum 24 hours from the completion, students received email feedback from the tutor.</p> <p>PedTut II will extend PedTut I based on the needs identified in the qualitative analysis of the comments of PedTut I participants (diagnosis and planning), on different methodological teaching aspects and emotional management. Modules will focus on both the instructive-educative process (held by pedagogy tutors) and psycho-social aspects associated to the teaching process (held by psychology students).</p> <p>The execution of e-tutorial will be as follows: videos will be composed of modules that address different educational topics (30 minutes per module), that the tutor-students will have to prepare together with the coordinators' team. The program will be hosted either by PedTut or by a free access platform. The speakers in the e-tutorial will be older students and we have also considered a few educational experts (school principals or inspectors).</p>	<p>Classes connected to the SL activity are identic to the components of the previous phase.</p>	<p>Learning about the strategies of planning an action to respond to the educational and professional needs of younger colleagues.</p> <p>In-depth learning of concept presented in the curricular contents or classes column.</p> <p>Learning about S-L, participative learning, civic engagement, enhancement of attitudes towards diversity.</p> <p>Participative and vicariant learning from colleagues' experience in teaching.</p>	<p>Participation in the activities of the S-L event: answering the students' pedagogical questions on PedTut, preparing academic material for suggestions, preparing for the each of the e-tutorial modules, preparing the physical setting for the video presentation, organizing meetings with the local media, motivating the academic staff to participate in the campaign, documenting the campaign with pictures and video.</p>

Annex 3. Reflection Stage for PedTut I & II, CLAYSS Template (2016)

ITINERARY	CURRICULAR CONTENTS / CLASSES	ACTIVITIES PROPOSED FOR STUDENTS' FIELD WORK	
		LEARNING	SERVICE
Reflections on the utility and efficiency of this particular SL event PedTut I and on each week's teaching practice, were made while completing the online reflection diary. In PedTut II, the reflection component will continue to take place online, weekly, in all stages of the project, in the form of written reflection journal. The written reflection will be doubled by a drawing poster. The systematization and communication itinerary process will take place at all the stages.	Classes connected to the SL activity are identical to the components of the previous phase.	Increasing awareness of students towards the needs of their close community and towards how their teaching practice and civic engagement impacts the quality of the educational process.	