

The Utilization of Ethical Models to Develop Learning Experiences and Improve the Programs at a Community Organization

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An examination of the after school programs at a local community organization has provided insight into the concept of Ethics. Margaret Mead, an American cultural anthropologist, once said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, that’s the only thing that ever has” (n.d.). The organization’s programs and our efforts as students are directly related to Mead’s message because together, we are helping to shape the community of Rochester, New York.

The programs offer youth a safe place to go after school and provide activities geared towards helping them improve their interpersonal and communication skills. Ultimately, we are trying to help the organization improve their programs so that the youth can be inspired, empowered, and better prepared for their futures. Additionally, we want to enhance the communication between the youth and staff, so they have strong and reliable relationships. This progress has the potential to be directly reflected in the overall community. In order to do this, we put in hard work and dedication. In addition, we not only used our intellectual knowledge to help in the process, we also gained intellectual knowledge by participating. Dissecting the process from logistical, team, and individual perspectives uncovered the learning experiences that come from such a process and the connections between the course objectives and a variety of mission statements. Furthermore, the experiences can be connected to various ethical models and concepts including the norms of caring and utilitarianism, the virtues of self-discipline and courage, and the concepts of stakeholders, servant leader and superleader.

First and foremost, my team members and I devoted plenty of hard work and dedication to the service learning project (SLP). In January, I visited the organization in order to introduce myself to the environment, programs, and several of the youth. On March 20, I met two employees of the organization, and they conducted a two-hour session where, together with my group members, I received training on how to utilize the Out-of-School Time (OST) observation instrument. Policy Studies Associates, Inc. developed the Out-of-School Time Observation Tool with the support of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation (Pechman et al. 2008). This instrument is what we used to analyze a variety of different programs the community organization offers to local youth. During this meeting the staff presented a short film to provide us with an example of what we would be observing.

Once everyone understood how to properly use the observation instrument, the next step was to divide the team into observation groups. The group I participated in observed a program for youth in grades 7-12, but there were other programs devoted towards youth in younger grades. I attended the program on Friday, March 23 and Monday, March 26 and observed four activities: Minute to Win It, a scavenger hunt, basketball, and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math). I observed the activities for a minimum of 15 minutes and completed the observation instrument based on what I had witnessed.

After the observations for the after school programs were complete, the group recorded all of the data into an Excel spreadsheet. This sheet calculated the average ratings for all of the programs based on activity and for the individual youth and staff categories. We also met several

other times to complete sections of the final report. Ultimately, we decided to formulate a document in Google docs which allowed all of us to edit one paper at any given time, and any changes that were made could be viewed by the members of the group.

After the observations were complete and the data was compiled, it was apparent that based on ethical grounds, we were justified in engaging in the SLP. We can justify this by using the ethical norms of care and utilitarianism. According to Cavanagh, the norm of caring can be defined as “responsibility to a person because of relationship” (2010, 88). Overall, the community organization and the class as a whole are building and strengthening significant relationships. The staff is looking out for their relationships with the youth by being kind, positive, and supportive. For example, during the STEM activity, the group of seventh graders was upset because they were unsure about what to make with their container of trash. One of the staff members explained that it was okay if they were uncertain about how to go about it. She helped them get started and offered some ideas regarding how to begin. After she contributed her advice, the kids were really able to get creative and innovative. Aside from the actual activities, the staff members showed a genuine concern for the overall well being of the children. By observing and reporting on the strengths and weaknesses of the programs, the class is also supporting the relationships between the staff and the youth. We are trying to improve the programs so that communication can be improved and the relationships can develop to be even stronger.

The norm of utilitarianism can also be used to justify engaging in the SLP. According to Cavanagh, the norm of utilitarianism can be defined as “the greatest good for the greatest number” (2010, 92). The organization as a whole is looking out for the common good of the community and its children. The programs are designed to give youth a safe place to go after school in a structured and enjoyable environment. The activities implemented at the programs are geared towards improving their interpersonal and communication skills and also help them move beyond their current level of understanding. This will affect the overall community because these learnings and skills can be used in their future endeavors. As a class, we are also bettering the community. We are helping the organization inspire and empower youth to be prepared for the future. This vision has the potential to be directly reflected in the overall community.

After some self-reflection, it is apparent that I have learned plenty from this experience. Specifically, I think the overall experience was both troubling and inspiring. The experience was troubling because it was obvious that the children needed guidance. During the activities, many of the youth seemed as if they did not have any desire to participate. There are plenty of reasons why this might be. For example, after a long day at school, some children might prefer to be home rather than at an after school program. In addition, some children could be dealing with issues that we may not be aware of. The issues could concern school or something that may be taking place at home. These children are the ones who could benefit from being shown the right direction, which is why the experience was also inspiring. I was able to see how mentors can help the children. Youth need mentors, which is something that I would love to be involved with.

The concept of being a mentor can directly be connected to the four virtues. It is directly connected because “good moral behavior is nurtured by mentoring, modeling, executive vision, and the corporate culture that this creates” (Cavanagh 2010, 107). According to Cavanagh, two of the four virtues are self discipline and courage. Self discipline can be defined as “the developed habit of not pursuing a good excessively” (106,107). He goes on to say that this is related to wanting to possess or control things (106). It was obvious that some of the youth did

not have this quality. For example, one specific youth during the Minute to Win It activity was very controlling. She would consistently try to dominate the game without taking the other youths' feelings into account. In addition, she would force her opinion onto others, without taking the time to listen to their opinions. Mentors could set an example for her. It is obvious that she has many mentors at the organization already, and these mentors try to give her the tools needed to develop the virtue of self discipline. However, there is only so much time and resources that these mentors can spend on one child because so many of the children need their attention as well so it is important for these children to have as many mentors as possible.

Courage was another virtue that some of the youths did not possess. According to Cavanagh, courage "enables one to overcome obstacles to do what is necessary to achieve a good goal" (2010, 106). During both days of observation there was one student who never participated in any of the activities and demonstrated the characteristics of isolation and introversion. From personal experience, I know it takes courage to overcome personality hindrances. The mentors at the organization could help her to become more outgoing and extroverted. For example, during the basketball activity, one youth was sitting on the sidelines watching. A staff member took the youth aside and started playing with him. Eventually, the youth wanted to play with the rest of the children. The staff member did a good job of gradually getting the youth to fully participate.

These precise virtues and learnings can be used in my future. Cavanagh points out that "just as individuals choose to be virtuous and repeatedly act to bring that about, so, too, managers must choose a specific style of managing if they seek to encourage a moral corporate culture" (2010, 107). Similar to my observations regarding why the SLP was inspiring, I hope to use these learning experiences when I am a manager. Specifically, I want to be able to help employees transform negative qualities into positive qualities, or in other words, I want to be a mentor to the individuals who need guidance.

The service learning project was connected with all of the learning objectives presented in the Management Ethics Syllabus in one way or another, but it was directly connected with two specific objectives. One of these learning objectives was number ten: "Applying intellectual and social capital for the improvement of the greater community, at work, in service and faith organizations, and in our classroom" (Leigh 2012b, 2). Specifically, we are assisting the community organization with their quality improvement efforts. We have been willing to share our unbiased feelings about their program offerings with the staff. To do this, we are using our ethical frameworks and concepts to guide our feedback.

The project was also connected with learning objective number three: "[D]evelop the ability to analyze ethical issues from various constituency and stakeholder perspectives" (Leigh 2012b, 2). We are representing the needs of a variety of different stakeholders, especially the community, by researching the programs that the community organization offers. This can also be linked to the article by Sandra Waddock. In regards to the community, Waddock addresses how an organization should be a neighbor of choice. This means, "being a welcome, trusted neighbor with a positive relationship within the communities where the company has operations" (2009, 193). By taking efforts to improve their role in the community, I would say that the organization is definitely a neighbor of choice. In addition, since Nazareth College gives students the opportunity to participate in community service throughout the school year, I would also say that Nazareth is a neighbor of choice.

This experience also has connections with the study of business administration. According to Cavanagh, "Business managers have the opportunity to make our society a better place for all. It is important for business people to communicate the importance of ethics, social

responsibility, and good character” (2010, 73). This service learning project enabled us to do just that. The experience allowed us to use our intellectual and social capital on ethics to help the overall community. We used what we learned in our ethics course as well as other courses to assist the staff with their programs. For example, leadership and interpersonal skills are two prime examples of qualities we are consistently developing in both business and liberal arts classes. It takes both of these qualities to be successful with this project because there is a great deal of teamwork involved and constant communication is needed with the managers and administrators of the organization. Furthermore, the project allowed us to make ethical observations and judgments that may be helpful to us in our business oriented futures.

Another connection exists between this experience and the mission statements of both the School of Management and Nazareth College. Particularly, this project enabled us to contribute value to ourselves, an organization, and to society (School of Management 2012). This allowed us to contribute value to ourselves because we gained intellectual knowledge just by participating. We learned about what programs the organization has to offer and what it takes to make those programs successful. In addition, we learned about the workings of a nonprofit organization. We contributed value to the organization because our observations could be used to obtain grants and demonstrate to outsiders and stakeholders that the business is consistently trying to improve their role in society. Finally, we contributed value to society by helping the organization build stronger communities.

A similar connection exists between the service learning project and Nazareth College’s mission statement. This project enabled me to develop the skills necessary to pursue a meaningful career and inspired dedication to the ideal of service to my community (Mission & Vision 2012). For example, it prepared me for active civic participation in a diverse democratic society because, while observing, I was in the vicinity of people of many diverse backgrounds. (Leigh 2012a, slide 6). In addition, it gave me the opportunity to gain practical experience in a potential career field (Leigh 2012a, slide 7). Furthermore, I utilized a variety of different skills while participating in this project including leadership skills, interpersonal and written communication, and project management, all of which can be used in my future managerial career.

There were a few challenges faced during the course of this project. One of the most obvious issues that arose while doing the work for this project can be directly connected to servant leadership. Cavanagh defines servant leadership as, “leaders who view their primary purpose as that of meeting the needs of others and helping others grow and develop” (2010, 250). I think this can further be connected to the idea of the “superleader,” “a leader who listens more, asks more questions, encourages learning, and uses less punishment” (251). In regards to this project, clear “leaders” emerged at the start of the assignment, but they did not have the qualities of a “superleader.” They did not always listen or promote positive communication. Alternatively, they would decide what was best for the team without discussing the decision with the overall group. Only after the decision was carried out would they talk about the situation. Even then they would not listen to the suggestions of the group. Furthermore, they did not ask questions, and they did not encourage self leadership. For example, they would not let individuals take initiative. When an individual did take initiative, the “leader” would alter whatever it was that the individual did. In other words, they were too controlling of the situation. Therefore, the team experience in this project did not fit the model explained by Cavanagh.

Dissecting the service learning project from logistical, team, and individual perspectives has uncovered the learning experiences that can be linked to a variety of ethical concepts,

learning objectives, and mission statements. Specifically the positive and negative learnings were connected to the norms of caring and utilitarianism, the virtues of self-discipline and courage, and the concepts of stakeholders, servant leadership, and superleaders. In addition, the experience was directly linked with the learning objectives of the course and the mission statements of the community organization, the School of Management, and Nazareth College. Overall, this experience affected many people including the class, the staff at the organization, and the youth. Ultimately, the results will hopefully be reflected in the overall community. Reflecting back on Meads (n.d.) message, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world,” it seems obvious that small endeavors taken by a few people can make a positive impact on the lives of many.

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