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Pedagogical elements of school community service and its role in personality development

Thesis for doctoral (PhD) dissertation

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Rationale for the choice of topic

In our society, volunteering is one of the most direct expressions of solidarity, responsibility and helping others. It is always driven and motivated by the desire to help. When we help the needy, the disabled, the elderly and all those in need, we not only improve the lives of those we help, but our own personalities also develop continuously.

The idea of introducing community service in schools was born in a social context where, in a 2008 survey on social trust, more than 80% of respondents said that no one cared about anyone else (Skrabski-Kopp, 2008).

In 2009, the TÁRKI European Social Report, prepared by the TÁRKI Institute for Social Research, pointed out that the Hungarian indicators for social trust and active participation elements of social capital are even worse than average: the level of willingness to help others and social contact is extremely low and the level of civic activity is very low (Giczi - Sik, 2009).

A 2011 study on the distribution of 'doers', 'rebels' and 'sufferers' in European countries showed that more than 70% of Hungarian society sees its life as a 'suffering' citizen (Csepeli - Prazsák, 2011).

These findings pointed to the need for urgent intervention. As a society, we cannot abandon those in distress, we must help those in need. We need to make young people aware that we are members of a community, and therefore responsible for each other and the community.

In 2011, the TÁRS programme, organised to mark the International Year of Volunteering, also raised awareness of the importance of selflessness in helping others. The introduction of community service in a meaningful way came up in the context of the Volunteering Studies. Dr. Klára Czike - András Tóth's annual report The Hungarian Volunteering Development Strategy 2007-2017 had already stated this years earlier: 'The education system in general does not include elements to encourage volunteering (credits, admission points, crediting as practical time), and therefore youth volunteering is still in its infancy' (Czike - Tóth, 2006, p.19).

The knowledge that can be imparted in the classroom setting, classroom activities have little impact on students' attitudes as a means of fostering social cohesion (Kasik et al., 2011; Knausz, 2011; Bodó, 2014; Zsolnai et al., 2015; Uzsalyné, 2015). To address this, the development of extra-curricular activities has been highlighted at national or international level. International experience (Celio et al., 2011) shows that well-functioning programmes based on

volunteering and social sensitisation can be effective tools to change the social problems listed above.

Recognising the importance of these issues, in September 2012 Hungary introduced the School Community Service (SSC) in secondary schools, which is compulsory for all students in all school leaving exam (baccalaureate) programmes and is currently a prerequisite for the entrance to the baccalaureate examination (Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education, § 6 (4); Act LXXX of 2019 on Vocational Education and Training, § 123 (21)).

International experience

Existing legal framework for volunteering

Hungarian experience

School Community Service

Figure 1: Flow chart for the introduction of the school community service

According to § 4.15 of the National Public Education Act, the definition of school community service is: "Social, environmental, individual or group activity for the benefit of the local community of the pupil, carried out in an organised framework, independent of financial interests, and its pedagogical processing."

The 50 hours of organised activity may be carried out by pupils in the areas defined by law. The following eight areas are eligible for community service in secondary schools: health, social and charitable, educational, cultural and community, environmental and nature protection, disaster prevention, joint sports and leisure activities with pre-school children, children with special educational needs and elderly people, and crime and accident prevention activities in certain police forces. In vocational training, joint sports and leisure activities with children of pre-school age, children with special educational needs and elderly people are not optional under the Decree as amended in 2020 (Government Decree No 12/2020 (II. 7.) on the implementation of the Act on Vocational Training, § 107(3)). From January, 2016 the proof of

the performance of service is conditional upon the commencement of the regular final exam (baccalaureate) examination.

In addition to community building, active citizenship education and career orientation, the introduction of school community service has been identified as an important goal of social sensitisation of students and the development and strengthening of voluntary motivation, i.e. education for volunteering (Bodó, 2015). As a result of the programme, they aim to produce socially sensitive, active citizens who recognise where they can and do contribute to the betterment of society, because they are aware that this is how a healthy society works (Bodó et al., 2018).

Research on community service programmes shows a very mixed picture, both internationally and domestically. Some studies show that certain characteristics, skills and abilities of students improved during community service (Celio et al., 2011; Chan et al., 2017; Amstutz, 2009; Astin - Sax, 1998; Bodó et al., 2017; Markos, 2019; Sárosi, 2019a; Sárosi, 2019b; Galambos, 2011), while other research suggests that service does not have an impact on subsequent volunteering (Handy et al., 2010; Spark, 2013; Padányi et al., 2009; Brown et al., 2007; Newhart, 2006).

The aim of this research is to provide a situational picture of the characteristics of school community service programmes. This paper attempts to identify the programme characteristics that are most relevant to the achievement of pedagogical goals and compares the data with the results of international studies. It also examines the experiences of the practical implementation of school community service from the perspective of the students, other school participants, teachers, coordinators, heads of institutions and mentors in the host institutions.

Structure of the essay

In the first theoretical part of the dissertation, we reviewed the historical background of school community service, the process of its development and its current situation. The most important international and national research findings on this topic were presented. We then clarified the concepts involved, examined the differences between volunteering and community service and presented the main features of the community service and service-learning models of service delivery. We looked in detail at the international programmes that have served as models for the introduction of community service, and described the characteristics of service-learning programmes in the USA, Europe and the Middle East.

In the next chapter of the dissertation, we reviewed the history of domestic school-based community service in Hungary and analysed what previous programmes may have helped to implement it. The last chapter of the theoretical part began with a description of the social context of school community service, and after examining the legal background, the aims, principles and fields of activity of school community service were presented. In particular, the roles, responsibilities and tasks of pupils, school leaders, school coordinators and host mentors are discussed.

In the second, investigative part, we set out to explore the possible impact and intensity of the service on the personal development of students. The aim was to gain an insight into the programme characteristics most needed to achieve pedagogical goals, based on the perceptions of the students, coordinators and heads of institutions and host institutions involved in the research.

The mixed-methods research followed Creswell's model of convergent parallel design, using quantitative and qualitative analysis. As an exploratory method, online voluntary questionnaires were used, followed by semi-structured and focus group interviews.

Based on a questionnaire survey among students (N=9960), the research investigated which personality changes can be induced by service in which fields of activity. Based on online questionnaires completed by school coordinators (N=473), we attempted to identify pedagogically effective service program characteristics. The thesis reflected on the focus group interviews with students and personal interviews with school leaders, coordinators and host mentors to present the current situation of school community service from the perspective of the participants. This involved interviews with coordinators and heads of 21 schools, 5 host leaders and 20 focus group interviews with students.

After presenting and interpreting the findings, the dissertation concludes with a summary of the findings, in which we make systemic recommendations, both those requiring and those not requiring legislative change, to promote the professional implementation of school community service.

Aims, questions and hypotheses of the research

Research on community service programmes shows a very mixed picture, both internationally and domestically. While some analyses show the effectiveness of compulsory school service, others show its ineffectiveness.

In Hungary, the introduction of the programme has left many practical and many professional questions to be answered. The expected learning outcomes and methodology of community service need to be clarified, and the conditions under which students' attitudinal and personal changes in the course of school community service need to be examined.

Due to the diversity and paucity of research findings, this paper sets out to describe the current state of school community service. It attempts to explore the potential impact and intensity of service on students' personal development. It aims to provide a picture of the programme characteristics most needed to achieve pedagogical goals, based on the perceptions of the students, coordinators and heads of institutions and host institutions involved in the research.

The indirect aim of the research is to help teachers, coordinators and host mentors involved in the organisation and delivery of school-based community service in general education and vocational education and training to organise, develop and implement programmes professionally.

In this study, we sought to answer the following questions:

I Questions on students' skills and abilities:

1/ Does school community service have an impact on students' skills and attributes? Are there differences between the areas of activity in this respect? If so, what differences can be identified?

2/ Do the subsamples generated by the research based on personality changes show differences in terms of background variables (gender, grade, parental education, type of school and geographical location)?

II Questions on the continued volunteering of students:

3/ Does the prior participation in organised leisure activities have an impact on the students' subsequent propensity to volunteer?

4/ Are there gender differences in the development of subsequent volunteering motivation? Does community service influence the development of students' later volunteering motivation?

5/ What tasks should be assigned to students during community service to increase their likelihood of volunteering in the future?

III Questions concerning the organisation and objectives of the programme:

- 6/ What are the characteristics of the school community service coordinator? Does the coordinator's personality influence the students' perception of the service?
- 7/ Does the existence of a professional organization, preparation and closure of the program show different results in the development of students?

In the light of the above questions, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis 1: The different areas of service activities develop different qualities and skills and have different intensities of impact on the personal development of students.

Hypothesis 2: The sub-samples generated from the research on personality change will show differences in terms of gender, parental education and type of school provider.

Hypothesis 3: Prior volunteering and participation in organised leisure activities among students will influence subsequent volunteering.

Hypothesis 4: Community service in school does not influence subsequent participation in voluntary activities.

Hypothesis 5: School community service will have a positive effect on later volunteering motivation in case students engage in activities that are interesting and useful to them during the service.

Hypothesis 6: A coordinator who undertakes the task for his/her own intrinsic motivation has a positive effect on students' attitudes towards service.

Hypothesis 7: Community service in schools will bring about positive changes in the personality of pupils if the preparation and processing of the programme is a real pedagogical method.

Research strategies and methods

To test our hypotheses, we used inductive research strategies, since we start from the concrete pedagogical reality, from experience, and analyse the data collected to arrive at a general conclusion (Falus, 2000). Within this, we used descriptive and contextual research strategies. In this case, we can speak of a descriptive strategy because in our research we want to analyse and describe the existing situation of community service in schools, the characteristics of the programmes, the opinions, attitudes and qualities of the students, teachers, mentors and heads of institutions involved in them.

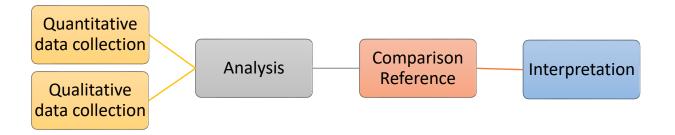
The second part of our research is contextual, as it seeks to find out whether school community service has an impact on students' skills, characteristics and future volunteering and, if so, what conditions are necessary for this to happen. It examines whether these changes are influenced by different background variables, the field of activity chosen, the person of the coordinator or the way the programme is organised.

To answer the research questions, quantitative and qualitative studies were carried out. We decided to use these two paradigms together because the data and information collected on the pedagogical topic under study, on social reality, on students' activities and attitudes, on the changes that may have occurred as a result of the service, cannot be analysed using only quantitative indicators (Sántha 2009). Combining quantitative and qualitative methods can help to explore the phenomenon under study in greater depth by taking into account several aspects, and using them together can serve to reinforce and support each other (Falus - Ollé 2008).

The mixed-methods research, which included both quantitative and qualitative studies, followed Creswell's convergent parallel design model (Sántha, 2013). During the research, quantitative and qualitative data collection was conducted in parallel, using online voluntary questionnaires as exploratory methods and semi-structured and focus group interviews. In the convergent parallel design model, quantitative and qualitative data are collected in parallel over time and then analysed separately. The two databases carry a sufficient amount of information to understand the problem outlined and to analyse the phenomenon in more depth, and also allow us to compare the data obtained. The process is concluded by the interpretation of the results.

Based on these results, the basic scheme of the model is as follows:

Figure 2: The basic scheme of Creswell's convergent parallel design model



Source: own edits based on Creswell (2012); Sántha (2013)

We opted for the mixed-methods model, which analyses both quantitative and qualitative data, because it ensures a more thorough investigation of the topic and a better interpretation of the phenomena revealed (Sántha, 2013). The inherent difficulty of questionnaire data collection is the measurement reactivity and we did not have a control group in the research, as the service is compulsory for all secondary school students. Thus, in addition to the quantitative data, we needed information from other sources that would give us the opportunity to look at the topic from different or multiple perspectives.

In the case of results obtained from multiple sources, we have the opportunity to examine the extent to which the data converge and point in the same direction (Sántha, 2009). By using a mixed methodology, the research also aimed to achieve complementarity, to complement the information obtained from numerical data with the concrete experiences of participants in the real pedagogical phenomenon.

To ensure validity, triangulation of methods was used in the study. Triangulation allows us to use different data collection procedures - questionnaire, semi-structured interview and focus group interview - to answer the same question repeatedly and to test whether they point in the same direction (Sántha, 2010). During the research, we used methodological and personal triangulation.

Written and oral interviews were chosen as exploratory methods and within this, several exploratory-insight research instruments were used:

- online voluntary questionnaires,
- semi-structured interviews and
- focus group interviews.

SPSS software was used to analyse the quantitative survey data, with principal component analysis, cluster analysis, analysis of variance and cross tabulation analysis.

However, the questionnaire method was only able to access a limited part of the data. For the more complex questions with many factors, we could only focus on the details and individual differences by using other methods and tools. For this purpose, we found the semi-structured and focus group interview to be the most appropriate, which also allows free space for sharing details that the interviewees consider important along pre-defined themes.

The interviews took place between April 2018 and May 2019. We talked to 21 school coordinators and heads of institutions about the topic, conducted 20 focus group interviews with students from different schools and contacted the heads of 5 host institutions to ask them to tell us about their experiences of community service. In total, we collected data from 10 counties and 14 cities (municipalities), resulting in 54 transcripts.

All the interviews were oral. For accurate analysis, the interviews were audio recorded using a mobile phone application (Samsung Voice Recorder v.20.1.86.12). The participants agreed to the recording of the interviews by signing the consent form. A transcript was made of all audio recordings, which were reviewed and analysed using MaxQda software during the qualitative analysis phase of the research.

During the study, a software program designed for the qualitative data analysis was used to create a code matrix and code map from the codes, perform document portrait comparison, examine word frequency, and create a word cloud and interactive word tree from the most frequent words.

Results of the research

Research on community service has produced mixed results both internationally and domestically. In the case of personal development services, by examining the program components of the models presented in this research, we identified different pedagogical elements. The pedagogical elements found in the literature are:

- linking the programme to studies,
- pre-definition of the programme's targeted focus and beneficiaries,
- professional organisation and quality assurance of service programmes,
- appropriate preparation and monitoring of students throughout the programme,
- ensuring the completion of the activity carried out,
- ensuring the necessary framework conditions for the programme and

- taking into account the guidelines and methodology of service learning as set out in international standards.

Research on different models so far shows that the positive impact of service on students' personalities can be enhanced if it is linked to school studies and if the main objectives and beneficiaries of the programme are defined in advance (Furco, 1996). However, in the absence of adequate preparation, students are not aware of what and how the service is intended to achieve and often view the lessons to be completed as a compulsory task (Bodó, 2015).

Without providing the necessary boundary conditions for the programme, the impact of service on personal development cannot be ensured. There is a need to introduce standardisation in the system, to provide hourly allowances for coordinators and to organise the preparation of students for service and the processing of experiences and lessons (Bodó, 2015).

The importance of organising the programme in a professional way is also evident from the fact that the quality of the experience of service plays a crucial role in later volunteering and personal development (Jones et al. 2008). The pedagogical elements of the study of school community service, the way the programme is organised, the quality of the programme and the issues of organising preparation and reflection are analysed in detail in the research part of the thesis.

The guidelines and methodologies of service learning as set out in international standards can serve as a good basis for this (Karlowits-Juhász, 2015). Based on these experiences abroad, it may be possible to organise professional, pre-defined, targeted programmes in the framework of school community service, which could ensure positive personal development and the attitude of students towards volunteering in the future.

This dissertation analysed the effects of the introduction of school community service on students' personality development and subsequent volunteering. The research investigated whether school community service is perceived by students as having an impact on their skills, attributes and subsequent volunteering and, if so, what conditions are needed for this to occur. We investigated whether the area of activity chosen, the person of the coordinator or the way the programme was organised influenced these changes.

The aim of our research was to provide an up-to-date picture of the characteristics of school community service programmes. We examined the experiences of school community service in practice from the perspectives of students, teachers, coordinators, heads of institutions and mentors in the host institutions. In this thesis, we set out to identify the programme components most needed to achieve pedagogical goals.

Among the questions we sought to answer were those related to students' personal development, their motivation to continue volunteering, and the organisation and objectives of community service.

Table 1: Results of the hypothesis testing

	Hypothesis	Results of the
		research
1.	The different areas of service develop different qualities	
	and skills and have different intensities of impact on the	
	personal development of students.	confirmed
2.	The sub-samples of personality changes generated in this	
	research show differences in terms of gender, parental	
	education and type of school operator.	rejected
3.	Among students, prior involvement in voluntary and	
	organised leisure activities influences subsequent	
	volunteering.	confirmed
4.	Community service in school does not influence	X
	subsequent participation in voluntary activities.	
		rejected
5.	School community service has a positive effect on	
	subsequent volunteering motivation if students engage in	C' 1
	activities that are interesting and useful to them.	confirmed
6.	A coordinator who undertakes the task for his/her own	X
	intrinsic motivation has a positive effect on students'	
	attitudes towards service.	rejected
7.	Community service in schools brings about positive	
	personality changes in pupils if the preparation and	
	processing of the programme is a real pedagogical method.	confirmed

The results of our research in relation to the questions examined are as follows:

I On students' skills and abilities:

1/ The different areas of school community service develop different qualities and skills and have different intensities of impact on the personal development of students. With this in mind, we can organise more personalised, goal-oriented programmes for students, focusing primarily on the personality changes that students need most.

2/ The sub-samples based on personality changes in the research show only minor differences between the clusters in terms of gender and mother's education and no differences between the clusters when looking at father's education. The clusters based on personality change do not show any correlation with the type of school provider. This suggests that the background

variables examined do not play a central role in the personality changes that may occur during community service. The factors influencing these should therefore be further explored in terms of programme characteristics and different ways of organising the service.

II On the continued volunteering of students:

3/ Among students, prior volunteering and participation in organised leisure activities and membership of associations, youth circles or clubs is associated with subsequent volunteering. Young people who participate in such programmes are more likely to undertake voluntary activities later on.

4/ Community service in school influences later participation in voluntary activities. Those who have already served are more likely to volunteer after graduation than those who have not yet served.

5/ School community service has a positive impact on future volunteering motivation if students are involved in activities that are interesting and useful to them.

III On the organisation and objectives of the programme:

6/ The way in which the coordinator is appointed (either by the coordinators themselves or by the head of the institution) has no impact on the attitude of the students towards the service. More than half of the coordinators in the sample see the organisation of community service primarily as an organisational task and only 8% see the assignment primarily as a pedagogical task.

7/ Community service in schools brings about positive personality changes in pupils if the preparation and processing of the programme is a real pedagogical method. Students who have participated in preparation and reflective closure are more likely to volunteer later than those who have not. Reflection and preparation emerged as an effective pedagogical tool in the organisational process in an atmosphere that supports community service, a phenomenon not observed in the case of refusing institutions. The role of the institution as a role model is of primary importance in the perception of school community service among students.

The aim of the study was to highlight the current strengths and weaknesses of school community service and to explore the experiences of the service so far. The results provided information on the attitudes, expectations and motivations of the students who have completed the community service and of the other participants in the service, and on the possibilities for improving the service programme.

Relevance, limitations and further research directions

It was also considered important to carry out the study and analysis because very little research has been done so far in this area. The dissertation analysed the consequences and changes that school community service can bring about in the lives of pupils and the conditions under which the intended personal development effects can be achieved. It suggested what elements could ensure the pedagogical effectiveness of the programme and what elements could help to increase its pedagogical effectiveness.

The results highlighted the potential and weaknesses of the service and drew attention to the role of the necessary programme components. On this basis, educational institutions can organise community service around pedagogical objectives, with an appropriate focus on preparation and closure, and host institutions can offer the right activities to students in service in order to achieve the desired personal development.

Due to the short time available, follow-up, and thus the study of the permanence of the effects, could not be organised. This could be done in the context of a future long-term study.

The research sample is not representative. In a future study, it would be advisable to work with a representative sample or perhaps to make the present research data representative by gender, municipality or type of school.

It would also be worthwhile to investigate other correlates of this topic, for example by including variables such as the grade point average or the sociometric position of the student in the class.

In the light of the results obtained, useful new pedagogical tools could be developed for the organisation of school community service, which could be of use to schools, coordinators, heads of institutions, students and host institutions in order to run the programme more effectively, and could also be used by other primary or higher education institutions where the aim is to educate young people to volunteer and develop positive character.

During the research we have seen that the coordinator often involves the form-masters and form-mistresses in the process of organising the school community service and delegates a large part of the task of training to them. In light of this, a further step in the research could be to interview the class teachers on the subject, to investigate the methodology of the pedagogical preparation and, in particular, the closure that is carried out. On the basis of the results of this study, a methodological guide could later be drawn up, using the concrete data, which would provide professional and effective support and a step-by-step description of the process of organising community service.

In the light of the results obtained, proposals for legislative and non-legislative changes that would facilitate the effective organisation of school community service programmes have been formulated. These proposals are designed to ensure that school community service programmes are organised in a pedagogically effective way, with the aim of providing students with experiences, skills, abilities and experiences that will positively shape their personalities and help them to become more open, accepting, socially sensitive and supportive people.

"... when she left the nursing home, the first thing she did was to call her own grandmother.

She was touched by what she saw."

(Excerpt from a coordinator's account of a visit to a social institution with students as part of school community service)

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