

Service-learning Program and the Lasallian Mission Formation Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

Jimi D. Caldea
De La Salle University, Manila

Abstract: De La Salle University's educational programs have been challenged to be continuously active in its social engagement amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The Center for Social Concern and Action (COSCA) directs all its social engagement initiatives relative to community development and students' Lasallian values formation. Service-learning (SL), being one of COSCA programs, is in exigency with these contexts and questions whether it is up for the challenge. Will it continue to adapt to fulfill its Lasallian Mission? Thus, in this paper, I present the recalibrated SL program, the eService-learning (ESL) program, that matches DLSU's pure online academic activity. How is ESL done and aligned with the Lasallian Reflection Framework that concretizes the Lasallian formation? It employs L.T. Burns' modules of the service-learning program. ESL successfully emerged in its consistency to deliver student learning, project effectiveness, efficiency, Lasallian values, and program management. Given that living and fulfilling the mission set forth by Saint John Baptist de La Salle makes one true and genuine Lasallian, the recalibrated service-learning continues to come out to be a concrete formation program for the Lasallian Mission.

Keywords: DLSU, Service-Learning, eService-learning, COVID-19, Lasallian Formation

Introduction

De La Salle University (DLSU) educational programs have been generally charged to be more socially engaged. Beyond the mandates of any regulatory bodies and accrediting agencies, DLSU has been socially engaged already by conducting community development initiatives through its social engagement arm, the COSCA. Through the inspiration of its founder, St. John Baptist De La Salle, who has devoted his life to be of service to the poor and abandoned children, DLSU continuously carries such a mission. Thus, by vocation, DLSU is about "enabling every Lasallian to acquire the vision, values, attitudes, and practices that support collaboration with God's creative and redemptive action in the world," i.e., through the "three constitutive elements that enable this participation: the spirit of faith, the zeal for the integral salvation of all, and the communion in Mission,

Mission as Communion" (La Salle Provinciate, 2009).

COSCA has developed and expanded throughout the years through its continuous quality improvement processes relative to its approaches, deployments, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and annual learnings integration. As one of its social engagement (SE) initiatives, SL was established in DLSU last 2012. It has ever since exceedingly progressed in terms of its approaches, linkages, i.e., locally and internationally, the number of academic courses integrations and deployments, and even considered to be a measure to achieve one of its institutional goals. DLSU has targeted that "all academic programs have community engagement components through the integration of SL in the curriculum" (DLSU Strategic Plan 2012-2016, 2012). Thus, service and education have become two inseparable teaching

pedagogy in DLSU, each one complementing each other to achieve each respective goals.

Through SL, students are formed not only to be academically excellent but also service-driven and other-centered. SL has become one avenue where students do SE through their SL project implementation – thus becoming aware of social realities. “...active service has remained at the center of Lasallian education through its curriculum and core values.... taking an important approach in teaching and learning that students needed to achieve to become service-driven Lasallians” (DLSU Service-Learning Framework, 2017). SL, being a practical application of classroom knowledge and learning achieved by assigning students to work on community-based projects, is an effective teaching style fostering interactive learning by integrating classroom activities into communities (Helms et al., 2015). Therefore, service learning’s presence in academics can enhance students’ academics, professional readiness, social orientation, community involvement, and commitment to serving the community (Fiebig, 2014).

However, when the COVID-19 pandemic forced Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) to close, SL has been put into question whether it can continue to deliver its expected outcomes in the pure online setup. As most HEIs recalibrate their syllabus into online learning, DLSU prepared for online education, including the COSCA-Service Learning Program (SLP) approaches and deployment processes. The ESL (L. Waldner et al., 2010) was COSCA-SLP’s proposed new approach. Thus, in this paper, I answer the following questions: 1. How can we continue Service-learning in this time of pandemic? 2. How can we serve and learn when community visits are restricted yet? And 3. Will ESL help us respond or reach out to the poor and the marginalized?

ESL, being a new approach, is very encouraging and, at the same time, challenging, considering the course design preparations and the partner communities’ readiness in communication hardware and software, which are critical to the success of online or e-service projects and student learning (Helms et al., 2015). Vibrant online collaborations and discussions among ESL stakeholders are the critical factors for its success (Shea & Pickett, 2005), including interaction with content, collaboration, conversation, intrapersonal

interaction, and performance support (Northrup, 2002). However, with some literature showing SL’s applicability in online courses in project completion, client satisfaction, student satisfaction, interaction, and skill-building of the traditional classroom (Helms et al., 2015; L. Waldner et al., 2010), COSCA-SLP decided to carry it out. It started various preparatory activities to ensure all stakeholders are ready. Moreover, ESL must also faithfully follow the traditional SL foundations: the Lasallian Reflection Framework (LRF) (Galgo, 2017); the adapted SL definition as course-based, reflective, reciprocal in partnership, and civic education, where students serve to learn and learn to serve (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995); and the Kolb’s model of experiential learning (McLeod, 2017).

In this paper, I present the ESL Program for the College of Business’s corporate social responsibility course in line with this. It matches DLSU’s pure online academic activity, i.e., still aligned with the Lasallian Reflection Framework (LRF) and with its other contexts (McLeod, 2017), (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995). How it contributes to student’s holistic development? How it allows them to learn while serving and serve while learning? I present the ESL process flow that still embodies the blueprint of Lasallian formation.

Methodology

This paper employs L.T. Burns’ modules of the service-learning program (on preparation, action, reflection, and evaluation) (Burns, 1998), and the integration of the principles both of Lasallian education and social development characterized and explained through the foundational principles of Lasallian formation (DLSP, 2009) that serves as a guide for all Lasallian formation and action programs, projects, and activities (Galgo, 2017). I then present the successful implementation of ESL and the students’ online evaluation results vis-à-vis delivery of student learning, project effectiveness, and efficiency Lasallian Values, and Program Management.

Results and Discussion

ESL and the Lasallian Reflection Framework

The LRF is embedded in the SL process flow. It is primarily because the LRF is considered the backbone or blueprint of all Lasallian Formation in DLSU. It is also because the LRF is anchored to the core values of Faith, Zeal of Service, and Communion in Mission. It serves as a guide to all formation and engagement activities (Galgo, 2017). The LRF is spread and observed along with Lasallian formation activities also because it is founded on St. John Baptist De La Salle's life, i.e., when he had his significant encounter with poverty and illiteracy among children during his time, where most children had little hope for social and economic advancement, his *Masid-Danas*; when he did reflect and discern on the experience, which was a long and challenging process. However, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Graces of God, he found his answers. He understood that education could give children hope and the opportunity to lead better lives of dignity and freedom through education. It was his *Suri-Nilay*. He, then, decided and committed, as his free response to God's call, his mission, which we now know as the Lasallian Mission. He was moved by the poor's plight, who seemed so "far from salvation" either in this world or the next. He committed and acted to put his talents and advanced education at the service of the children. He started teaching until his death, and he established the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. It was his *Taya-Kilos* (*Lasallian Reflection Framework - De La Salle University*, n.d.).

Moreover, DLSU SL's context is founded on the Principles of Lasallian Education in the Philippines and the Principles of Lasallian Social Development (DLSP, 2009). Generally, these are the guide of DLSU to its social development initiatives, which SL also draws its inspiration and purpose. In summary, they are represented in the Five Core Principles of Lasallian Schools as DLSU's initiative to "share in the mission" and its commitment to shape and substantiate its programs and activities (Kopra, 2020). First, on faith in the presence of God, DLSU SL ushers the promotion and "deepening" of this principle through students' exposure to social realities that allow them to see God's presence along the way. Students get to deepen such experience through the processing activity or reflection sessions. Second, on the Concern for the Poor and Social Justice, DLSU SL both brings students to an awareness of the poor and victims of injustice and "requires" them to respond through their SL

projects. Third, on the Respect for All Persons, DLSU SL tries to engage in a concerted effort to respect all persons' dignity (*The Five Core Lasallian Principles - Christian Brothers University*, n.d.). It ensures that students get to have genuine dialogue and experience with their partner communities to have a deeper understanding of social reality. Fourth, on the Quality Education, DLSU SL completes DLSU education that prepares students for college and career and life. DLSU prepares students to be academically excellent and to be professionally and socially responsible and service-oriented. SL makes students more ready to live a genuine Lasallian life who can continue the mission set forth by De La Salle. Fifth, in the Inclusive Community, DLSU SL does not discriminate because it serves various organizations with various needs. It respects diversity, where no one is left out, and where everyone finds a place. All SL stakeholders, the students, faculty, the University, and its partner organizations (POs) are all called and are within "The Lasallian Family".

Consequently, centered on these foundations, SL approaches and deployments should be carefully crafted. The following is the process flow of the traditional SL. I wish to highlight this before I present the ESL process flow to demonstrate how the process faithfully observes its various Lasallian principles. First, in the *see and experience* or *masid-danas* activity, students go through community orientation through "community tour" and "dialogue" with the community's people at their assigned partner organization's (PO) site. It is crucial because our students can never effectively proceed to the next stage of the LRF if this is not undergone. Second, the *analysis and reflection* or *suri-nilay* activity, where students cognitively understand the context of the community's culture, environment, and identified needs. It is essential for the students' SL project proposal to be responsive and impactful. It is done by asking more questions to the community leaders during the orientation and researching the context and local and national situationaire. Third, the student's *commitment and action* or *taya-kilos* activity to implement and turnover their SL projects. Reflection session (Ash & Clayton, 2009) follows and presentation of the whole SL experience. And then, students accomplish ESL online evaluation form.

Reflection is necessary to cap the entire experience because it provides the essential

academic learnings, personal and values development, and action plans. No activity is more central to understanding and implementing service-learning programs than reflection. To say that experience is a good teacher does not imply that it's easy or automatic. If it were, we'd all be a lot wiser than we are. While it's true that we can learn from experience, i.e., with reflection. We may also learn nothing, i.e., without reflection (Toole & Toole, 1995).

Accordingly, due to the relevance of the process of the LRF along with the students' formation and the Lasallian Mission, it has become a must and non-negotiable in the service-learning process flow.

ESL is the type of service-learning that DLSU employed. It is the "result" of the "intersection" of the "traditional" service-learning and "online" learning (L. Waldner et al., 2010a). Its context was the significant demand for "online learning" in the united states (L. S. Waldner et al., 2012). COVID-19 pandemic, however, is our context of why we employ ESL.

The ESL process flow is a best practice-based process and is based on the traditional service-learning outcomes in terms of student SL project output completion, partner communities and student satisfaction, interaction among stakeholders, and skills building. The authors have concluded that service-learning could be done online (L. S. Waldner et al., 2012).

Mindful of the Lasallian Formation's blueprint, the LRF, ESL should also faithfully frame its processes accordingly. The following is what we do in ESL. On the *masid-danas* phase, students have the service-learning class orientation using synchronous and asynchronous tools by watching ESL orientation and the PO orientation videos; from these videos, students identify issues and needs of the PO for possible ESL Projects; they then create and propose their group's ESL project through synchronous class presentation activity with the PO's virtual presence. On the *suri-nilay* phase, students update and coordinate with the faculty and PO their ESL project's progress and concerns. And when this gets approved, it proceeds accordingly. On the *taya-kilos* phase, students submit online all their deliverables or via online delivery services to their PO or COSCA, who facilitates the turnover of

some ESL projects to the POs. Synchronously, students present their final output and their whole ESL experience, from the project identification, planning, coordination, implementation, and reflection over the entire ESL processes relative to their academic learnings, personal and values development, and plans of action. And then, students accomplish ESL online evaluation form.

ESL Evaluation

Relative to the ESL online evaluation of students on their ESL experience. We had 65% of Student Respondents under the Corporate Social Responsibility and Governance Course for Term 3, AY 2019-2020. Based on the students' honest opinion, using the Likert scale if they "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree" with the statement, generally, students "Strongly Agree" on all areas under evaluation: on student learning, on project effectiveness and efficiency, on Lasallian values, on program management.

On Student Learning, the majority strongly agree that ESL is relevant to the course they are taking. They said that they were provided with course-based knowledge and skills necessary for ESL project implementation; that the learning outcomes of the course have been attained; that the service component of this course has strengthened their belief that students like them can contribute to the empowerment of the poor and marginalized communities/sectors; and that they have gained a better understanding of Service-learning because of this course.

On Project Effectiveness and Efficiency, they said that they felt that their ESL project contributed to the efforts of the organization/community to respond to their own needs; that a written plan guided their ESL project; that they had sufficient resources to implement the project/activity plan; and that they were able to implement their ESL project with minimal technical/connectivity problem.

On Lasallian Values, they said that they were able to see and understand the situation of the community virtually; that they were able to analyze and reflect on the symptoms and causes of the community issue/problem being addressed; that they were involved in the consultation, planning, implementation, and evaluation of the ESL project

as a result of an analysis-reflection process on the community/partner situation; that their dignity and all of the stakeholders were respected during the entire process; and that they were motivated by their ESL experience to be more socially involved even after project completion.

On Program Management, they said that they felt that the ESL project could be continued or sustained by the PO on its own; that everyone in their group was able to perform and complete her/his assigned tasks; that they were oriented about the PO/community before all our ESL related activities; that their class, the faculty, and the PO leveled-off on project outputs and activities; that they proper coordination and cooperation with the representatives of the PO; that their Faculty In-charge was involved in the entire process of service activity; that the online project activity with the community/organization was appropriate; and that the community representatives have guided them during the whole ESL process activity.

Conclusion

The students, because they are the “inheritors” of De La Salle’s “Legacy of Service to the Poor”, DLSU has provided its community, through its academic programs, service-learning for students to be socially engaged and steeped in service. One may ask what is in such Lasallian SE formation contributing to their becoming genuine Lasallian? La Salle Provinciate puts it clearly that Lasallian is a person who is personally fulfilling the mission set forth by Saint John Baptist de La Salle” (La Salle Provinciate, 2009). Accordingly, given that students learn best not by reading the great books in a closed room but by opening the doors and windows of experience (Ehrlich, 1996), SL, therefore, enhances students’ academics, professional readiness, social orientation, community involvement, and commitment to serving the community (Fiebig, 2014). Moreover, By combining the needed social engagement with the course objectives and reflection writings and articulations of the whole SL experience, students further enrich the learning experience, personal growth, resolve for service, the needed social skills for citizenship, and the expected Lasallian graduate attributes.

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, DLSU continues to carry out its mission. It has designed and deployed appropriate programs to be continuously relevant to

society. Thus, it considers them vital and provided enough budget for the programs’ proper and complete delivery. ESL is one of these new programs implemented to continue the Lasallian values formation, i.e., to enable every Lasallian to acquire the spirit of faith, the zeal for service, and the communion in mission. ESL remains to usher the promotion and deepening of these core values through students’ virtual exposure and dialogue to understand social realities. It brings them to an awareness of the poor and victims of injustice and “requires” them, through their course, to respond through their ESL projects. DLSU ESL allows each student to bring their own gifts, talents, experiences, etc. to their ESL project, manifesting each person’s inclusivity. Everyone contributes to and enhances everyone who is involved in the whole ESL experience. ESL is welcoming, encouraging, and inviting. Students are arranged into smaller groups for them to work for their ESL project and foster the power of relationships in education relative to intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual formation. De La Salle discovered this very early in his experience with the schools: *it is in a community that we are most effective*. De La Salle believed that we are stronger and wiser as a group than any of us are as individuals (Kopra, 2020). ESL harnesses this value. Students are encouraged and assisted in finding their significant role and possible contribution to the broader community.

Thus, ESL completes DLSU education by preparing students to be academically excellent, professionally and socially responsible, and service-oriented individuals. As a result, ESL continues to make students ready to live a genuine Lasallian life who can continue the mission set forth by De La Salle. To ensure that everything is in place COSCA SLP has observed continuous quality improvement processes by constantly monitoring and evaluating, and integrating learning mechanisms every after each term. ESL online evaluation results showed success in its consistency to deliver the intended learning outcomes. ESL continues to come out to be a consistent and concrete formation program for the Lasallian Mission.

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