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The impact of service-learning from the community partner's perspectives at a private university in Ecuador

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Resumen

El aprendizaje y servicio es una pedagogía que provee a los estudiantes de experiencias auténticas de aprendizaje, en las que aplican sus conocimientos y desarrollan sus habilidades, actitudes y valores, a través de proyectos que promueven la responsabilidad social y el servicio a la comunidad.

Este estudio consistió en un análisis cualitativo de diez entrevistas, que se utilizaron para analizar la perspectiva de los socios comunitarios sobre el impacto del programa de aprendizaje y servicio en sus organizaciones. Diez participantes participaron voluntariamente en este estudio, y los datos fueron transcritos y analizados para desarrollar códigos y temas, de los cuales se obtuvieron cuatro principales (grado de compromiso de los estudiantes, ventajas e inconvenientes del servicio-aprendizaje, comunicación y cooperación e interacciones sociales).

Los datos analizados mostraron que los socios comunitarios están muy satisfechos con el programa de aprendizaje y servicio en sus organizaciones, y señalaron la importancia de lograr un alto grado de responsabilidad y compromiso a través del servicio. Además, estos resultados proporcionaron información importante sobre los elementos que se requieren para lograr una relación exitosa entre los socios comunitarios y las instituciones educativas, tales como una buena comunicación, responsabilidades compartidas, retroalimentación apropiada y respeto por los diferentes valores, y de esa manera obtener beneficios mutuos.

Abstract

Service-learning is a pedagogy that provides students with authentic experiential opportunities to develop and apply their skills in extended learning possibilities, while developing a sense of social responsibility by serving the community.

This study consisted on a qualitative analysis of ten interviews, that were used to analyze the community partners' perspective about the impact of service-learning in their organizations. Ten participants voluntarily took part in-depth interviews, and data were transcribed and analyzed in order to develop themes; four major themes were taken into account (student's degree of engagement and commitment, advantages and drawbacks of service- learning, communication and cooperation, and social interactions).

The data analyzed showed that community partners are highly satisfied with the service-learning program in their organizations, and pointed out the importance of achieving a high degree of engagement and commitment through the service. In addition, together these results provided important insights about the elements that are required to have a successful partnership between community partners and organizations, such as a good communication, shared responsibilities, appropriate feedback, and respect for different values, in order to obtain mutual benefits.

Key words: Service-learning, community engagement, mirror neurons, empathy, scholarship of engagement.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

One of the main goals of higher education is to promote actions that go beyond the construction of new knowledge and the training of its students; a key aspect of today's universities is that they are recognized as part of the community, overcoming the isolation of the traditional model. For these reasons, several educational institutions have introduced service-learning projects, where they connect classroom instruction with community service, with enriching opportunities for students, faculty, organizations and the community.

As Musil (2003) points out, service-learning is a holistic, student-centered pedagogy that aims to create a participatory environment through civic engagement and mutual collaboration; it is also an innovative proposal that connects service and learning into one coherent and structured educational activity.

According to Rodríguez-Gallego (2013), service-learning projects have been created and structured by educational institutions and community partners together, to meet specific needs of the community and to contribute to local community development; the main goals of service-learning projects is to provide quality learning, developing personal values, and building a democratic citizenship.

There is a wide range of terminology to define this methodology that show its different dimensions and explains its purposes, such as fostering experiential education through service-learning programs, promoting civic commitment and values, and using knowledge as a tool to improve the standard of living in a community (d'Arlach, Sánchez & Feuer, 2009).

There is a general agreement on the two basic components of service-learning: first, the meaningful learning of the contents that are linked to the curriculum; and second, the service that results in the transformation of a community. In addition, the emphasis of

service-learning must be set on reciprocity, so all participants (students, recipients of service, and educational institutions) are expected to benefit from this activity (Bushouse, 2005).

D'Arlach et al. (2009) state that the 'recipients of service' are the ones who can give a clearer evaluation of service-learning in the organizations, since they have an active voice as part of the projects by stating their concerns, and who in this case, are the community partners (Batlle, 2011). For this reason, it is essential to understand who the community partners are and their role in the service-learning.

According to the Center for Community Learning and Leadership (2016), community partners are non- profit organizations, public or private, who participate in the service-learning program as an integral part of academic courses; their main role is to engage students in meaningful activities that support student's personal, social and academic development in their organizations.

Community partners guide students, provide training and communicate with the faculty to evaluate and improve future programs; for example, Holland (2003) emphasizes the significance of community partners for a successful relationship by creating "mutually-beneficial and enduring interactions, through formal partnerships with educational institutions." (p. 3)

Statement of the Problem

There is extensive literature and research that explores and describes the effects of service-learning on the students who participate in the program; yet, there is a lack of attention to the implications and impact of service-learning in the organizations where students take part; this is why we need to understand the significance of service-learning from the community partners´ perspective (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996).

Service-learning research and practice has yet to be analyzed critically from the perspectives of the community partners, since they play an integral role in the service learning experience. If one of the aims of higher education is to participate in social programs in order to solve real world problems, educational institutions must be engaged with the community as active partners (d'Arlach, et al. 2009); consequently, this study was aimed to answer the following research question:

How do community partners who work with adults from different non-profit organizations in Quito, Valle de los Chillos and Tumbaco, perceive the impact of the service learning program provided by the university in their organizations?

Theoretical Perspective

Service-learning projects are designed to connect students' learning, skills, attitudes and values with social commitment; it is also viewed as a philosophy that brings together the cognitive and the ethics dimensions of the students, and focuses on quality education and social inclusion (Gidley, Hampson, Wheeler & Bereded-Samuel, 2010).

As Eyler and Giles (1999) state, service-learning is

A form of experiential education where learning occurs through a cycle of action and reflection as students. . . seek to achieve real objectives for the community and deeper understanding and skills for themselves. In the process, students link personal and social development with academic and cognitive development . . . experience enhances understanding; understanding leads to more effective action. (p.6)

According to these authors, service-learning combines structured opportunities for learning with providing a service to the community, integrating multidisciplinary theory and knowledge with practice, and deepening their understanding of the causes of social problems (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

As any project, service-learning must have four key components: (1) preparation (through readings, class discussions, on-site activities); (2) action (the actual service performed by students in the community); (3) reflection, (where students reflect critically on their experience, before, during and after the service); and finally, (4) contextualization, by including course objectives and the type of service provided in the organizations, and connecting them to the theories and concepts in the classroom (Duffy, 2017).

As a teaching strategy, service-learning is based on Kolb's cycle of experiential learning experiential learning theory, that encourages students to be responsible for their own learning; from this perspective, experience is built in four different stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. Through this process, students are engaged in synergetic transactions between them and the environment, integrating institutional development activities, creating educational learning spaces that promoting learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

In addition, through service-learning, learners are able to develop critical thinking skills as well as higher order skills of analysis and synthesis. Students are able to integrate knowledge over time and subjects, and apply what they know to practical situations; when students have opportunities to actively use classroom knowledge in other settings, they develop an understanding of when and how knowledge can be applied in different contexts (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Bringle & Hatcher, 1996).

Although service-learning is a student-centered model, its main goal is that students become active members in their community, as it stresses both the learning goals and the service in a way that both are reciprocally enriched. Swords and Kiely (2010) point out that reflection is a very significant step in the process that links learning with service; it is

necessary to engage students in reflection about their own learning and in the outcomes of their participation in the organizations.

Service-learning can be confused with community service, however, community service is a form of volunteerism that can be done at a specific location, but its goal is only to serve, so it has no relation with teaching or learning; in contrast, service-learning connects the curriculum with the needs of the community, so as an instructional methodology, it focuses both on the service and on the learning goals (Slavkin, 2007).

Another important difference between service-learning and community service is that the central aspiration of service-learning, is to increase the civic and social engagement in students while they learn, and at the same time, bring universities and communities together; while in community service, students are focused only in the improvement of a certain group (D'Arlach, et al. 2009).

Service-learning is also considered a community engagement pedagogy that aims among other things, to develop interpersonal skills, reduce stereotypes and encourage a greater inter-cultural understanding, improve social responsibility, and promote greater involvement in community (Mitchell, 2008).

One of the most important features of service-learning is that it includes social processes that are the base for social dynamics in the organizations; people are influenced by the behaviors and cognitions of others through interpersonal contact and social interactions. For these reasons, it is important to analyze the different social and environmental variables that act together within the organizations, as an ecological phenomenon of the development of social systems (Ostrom 2009).

As there is not enough research that examines the community outcomes of service-learning, theoretical and conceptual frameworks to understand the implications and

recommendations for service-learning research are needed (Clayton, Bringle & Hatcher, 2013). For this purpose, the Psychoecological Systems Model (PESM) will be considered as a guide to community interventions related to service-learning, that explains human development from the interaction with the genetic and environmental variables, and presents the different systems that form interpersonal relations according to the context (Reeb & Folger, 2013). Also, the Van de Ven's (2007) diamond model of engagement scholarship will be used to analyze the relevance of service-learning as a community-based pedagogy.

Engaged scholarship and service-learning have common goals, such as to combine theory and practice and to develop social research through "evidence-based practices" (Van de Ven, 2008, p.2). According to this author, there are different ways to perform engaged scholarship, since it is also based on relationships that require negotiation, collaboration and respect. It is also a form of inquiry where the perspectives of all the people involved are analyzed.

In addition, the Psychoecological Systems Model (PESM) incorporates three theoretical concepts: (1) reciprocal determinism, based on Bandura (1978) that states that environmental factors and behavior have a reciprocal relationship; (2) the Biopsychosocial Model, developed by Kiesler (2000), that identifies internal factors such as vulnerability, resiliency and development; and external factors, such as risk and protective factors; and finally, (3) the Ecological Systems Model, proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1996) that is an environmental approach to the development of the individuals' cognitive, moral and social interactions, that points out the lasting changes in the way an individual perceives the environment, and is related to the experience in the ecological context.

The ecological approach plays an important role in psychology and education, as it draws attention to the lasting changes in the way an individual perceives the environment, and is related to the experience in the ecological context through the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) theory, that strengthens other values such as affectivity and sociability (Gifre & Esteban, 2012).

Bronfenbrenner (1996) names four systems that start from the individual: (1) the microsystem, or the first level of development that includes the family, parents or school; (2) the mesosystem, which is a system of microsystems and includes the interrelation of two or more environments where the individual participates actively, as the family and the school; (3) the exosystem, that refers to the forces that influence the microsystems, where the individual is not perceived as an active subject.; (4) the macrosystem, that involves the broader levels of interrelations, such as the community, the culture, etc.; (5) supramacrosystem, that refers to the global influences, values, goals, etc. and (6), the cronosystem, that refers to the historical time where the individual lives.

To understand the behavior of pshycoecological systems, it is necessary to analyze the relationship between a social system and its relationship with a specific ecological environment. According to Gallopin (2006), social systems are characterized by a constant exchange of energy and information with its environment. The ecological orientation in community intervention aims to understand the interaction between the individual and the environment. These interactions are facilitated or encouraged among students and community through the environment, and produce emotions that have a strong influence on how the environment is perceived.

As Langstraat and Bowdon (2011) mention, "Emotions, rather than being limited to individual and private experiences, are socially constructed and experienced" (p.2).

According to these authors, service-learning enhances students' intellectual and emotional development; as a reciprocal activity, students and community members engage in relationships that develop emotional responses such as empathy and compassion, that have been identified in circuits on the brain that show the activation of neurons in the same regions where the brain activates while observing other persons' emotions. These neurons "mirror" the actions or behaviors of others, and help explain how we feel empathy and compassion for others.

Empathy is directly related to mirror neurons, a particular type of visuomotor neurons, that are considered essential for interpersonal relationships and social interaction, since they let us internalize and learn from somebody else's feelings and thoughts, and allow us to answer fundamental issues about the capacity of individuals to understand other people, themselves and relate effectively to the rest of the world (Immordino- Yang & Damasio, 2007; Ochsner & Lieberman, 2001).

Empathy is internally centered and sets on regions in the brain that are related to automatic affective processes. Botvinick, Jha, Bylsma, Fabian, Solomon and Prkachin (2005) found that there was greater activity in the central prefrontal ventromedial cortex when an individual sees someone else´s suffering, but not with its own pain, which suggests that this region can contribute to additional processes evoked by empathy.

As mirror neurons provide a neural basis for empathy, it is important to analyze the way emotional components affect social relations from the point of view of neuroscience; there is a direct relationship between the brain functions known as cognition, affection and social relations. Social development has a great influence in cognitive and emotional development, since genetic inheritance is directly connected to the physical and social environment (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007).

Affective networks control our emotional involvement in a way that we stay engaged through motivation and commitment (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). Emotional connections are fundamental components of service-learning, as social interaction brings forth emotional and behavioral responses; a wide range of mental states and emotions are linked with more extensive connectivity and with greater hippocampal activation that may have a crucial role in processing social emotions (Carson & Domangue, 2013).

According to Ochsner and Gross (2004) it is essential to explain the socio-emotional phenomenon through three levels of relationship: 1) social, that includes description of the social context, experiences and behaviors; 2) cognitive, that specifies the information process mechanisms; and 3) neural: that explores the neuronal bases where these mechanisms are based; these elements can help us understand the brain factors that influence in interpersonal relations, and the way they can improve the way we communicate and relate with others.

The implications of affective and social neuroscience in service-learning must be explored, as well as the critical role of emotions that deal with social interactions, relationships and social behavior in general. Cognitive and affective neurosciences provide us with a central framework to understand social interaction. According to Immordino- Yang and Damasio (2007), it is important to take into account the connections between emotions and social functioning in a social context, in order to understand the ways that biological mechanisms for emotion work.

Social neuroscience integrates theories, methods and phenomenon that are part of social sciences; for example, researchers use tools such as fMRI (Functional magnetic resonance imaging) PET (Positron emission tomography), transcraneal magnetic stimulation, and ERP (Event Related Potentials) to understand better the relationship between social interaction and emotions (Amodio & Frith, 2006).

Another important emotional response related to service-learning is compassion. According to Langstraat and Bowdon (2011), compassion is an intense social emotion that and involves not only judgment but also action, and requires the understanding of the suffering of other people and lets us identify with those who suffer, through solidarity and commitment.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of service-learning in organizations for the care of teenagers and adults, such as nursing homes, charitable foundations and organizations for education and health, located in the valleys of Tumbaco and Los Chillos, and the city of Quito. This was done through the analysis of the perspectives and experiences of the community partners, as a way to understand the impact of service-learning in the organizations where they part of the program.

Significance of the Study

A great number of schools and higher institutions around the world include service-learning as part of their curricular offer as an innovative pedagogical approach, as it enables students to learn through their active participation in experiences of service, and at the same time, satisfy real needs of the community; specifically in Ecuador, some schools and higher institutions incorporate service-learning in their syllabus, as a way to connect their learning objectives with the community (Rodríguez-Gallego, 2013).

In the Ecuadorian context, the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador (2008, Art. 343) establishes that one of the main objectives of the national system of education, is the development of individual and collective skills and potentialities of the people to foster the academic and profesional development through a scientific and humanistic vision. In

addition, the Organic Law on Higher Education (LOES, 2012) in articles 87 and 88, points out that prior graduation, students should mandatorily fulfill their responsibility with the community by being involved in activities of social service, in order to benefit marginalized sectors of the population. This is aimed to promote a better living, and to improve the quality of life in the community, by strenghtening the connections between the higher institutions and organizations.

Results of this study are significant in many ways for both theory and practice in service-learning. First of all, the study will provide a better understanding of the service-learning experience from the community partner's perspective, which is an area of research that has frequently been neglected. On the basis of this information, educational institutions and organizations may be able to provide more meaningful service-learning opportunities for students and communities.

Second, this study is significant as the community partners' perspectives towards service-learning can help us understand the needs, preferences, interests, opportunities, and constraints of the organizations where the university provide service. In addition, this study provides some insight into the outcomes perceived by community partners of various organizations, helping service-learning practitioners to gain a more thorough understanding about the organizations and how they may benefit from their participation in this program.

Finally, the views and experiences of the community partners are an underdeveloped source of information and an invaluable source of insight into a program's effectiveness that can improve practice, leading to better outcomes through the improvement of the service-learning intervention. For these reasons, this study will contribute to benefit educational institutions, teachers, students, service-learning practitioners and policy-makers for future program analysis and implementation, focusing on benefits, outcomes, and variables related

to meeting community needs, and therefore, maximizing service-learning programs effectiveness and success.

Definition of terms

Service-learning: any carefully monitored service experience in which a student has intentional learning goals and reflects actively on what he or she is learning throughout the experience (National Society for Experiential Education, 1994).

Community partners: nonprofit organizations, where students provide service as an integral part of their academic courses. Service may include direct service with users, special projects, research, or other activities stipulated by the community partner to meet a real need in their organizations (Center for Community Learning and Leadership, 2016).

Community service: community service is the of students' engagement in activities that primarily focus on the service being provided, as well as the benefits the service activities have on the recipients (e. g., providing food to the homeless in the streets). The students receive some benefits by learning more about how their service makes a difference in the lives of the service recipients (Furco, 1996).

Community engaged scholarship: is scholarship that places a university's resources to solve community problems through two main areas: academic service learning and based research (Calleson, Jordan, & Seifer, 2005).

Event Related Potentials (ERPs): very small voltages generated in the brain structures in response to specific events or stimuli (Blackwood and Muir, 1990).

Mirror neuron: a type of brain cell that fires when you do an action, and also when you simply watch someone else doing the same action (Gallese, 2001).

Community engaged scholarship: "is defined by the collaboration between academics and individuals outside the academy - knowledge professionals and the public

(local, regional/state, national, global) - for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity." (New England Resource Center for Higher Education, 2017).

The next chapter will provide a theoretical basis for this study, reviewing an overview of the literature that was organized into four broad categories: (a) service-learning pedagogy, (b) psychoecological systems model of engaged scholarship and service-learning research (PESM), (c) emotional connections in service-learning, (d) service-learning experience in other countries, (e) community partner's role in service-learning and (F) social outcomes of service-learning.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

` In order to understand the implications and impact of service-learning from the perspective of the community partners, it was necessary to structure this research study into a conceptual framework, through the review of some theoretical approaches, and the analysis of previous research studies on service-learning.

Sources

Related areas of research about service-learning were explored in peer-reviewed journals, online magazine articles, books, dissertations and other theses, as a way to provide a background for this study.

Procedures

To obtain the relevant information for this research, the following steps were followed: 1) a concept map was created to determine the topics and subtopics related to the research, 2) an information search about the topics was made in different sources, such as EBSCO, JSTOR, Google Scholar and dictionaries, 3) identification of reference authors in books and articles for additional information, 4) selection of relevant information.

The purpose of this literature review was to examine research related to service learning and its impact in the community from the community partners' perspective; specifically, this chapter provides a synthesis of the literature related to service-learning as pedagogy, the Psycho-ecological systems model and engaged scholarship (PESM), the emotional connections that are fostered by service-learning, the experience of service-learning programs in other countries, community partner's role in service-learning, an analysis of the social outcomes related to service-learning pedagogy.

Service-learning pedagogy

Service-learning is a form of experiential learning based on Kolb's learning cycle that centers on the role of experience in the learning process. From this perspective, students build knowledge that includes four different stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. Through this process, students are engaged in synergetic transactions between them and the environment, integrating institutional development activities and creating educational learning spaces that promote learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

Additionally, experiential learning adds value to education, preparing students for lifelong learning and participation, connecting disciplines with real- world situations; experiential learning provides students with opportunities to form bonds with each other, with faculty, and with community members while taking part in meaningful projects; through experience students develop problem solving and critical thinking skills (Eyler, 2002).

Service-learning is also an educational and social tool that strengthens the relationships among all the participants, improves the communication between the different sectors of the population, and aims to create better relationships with the organizations that take part of the program (Batlle, 2011).

Furthermore, Eyler and Giles (1999) addressed a broad analysis of student's outcomes of service-learning. The authors conducted three studies to determine the results of the service-learning experience through interviews in order to understand the outcomes in areas such as personal development, civic engagement, application of knowledge and reflective practice among others. In addition, this study determined the benefits of service-learning through plentiful opportunities for students to reflect upon their experiences, while participating in projects that are directly related to community needs.

Several studies have proved that service-learning provides students with the opportunity to connect their personal goals and values with the curriculum, promoting an interdisciplinary approach to academic study. For example, service-learning is an important tool for social and cultural transformation, based on solidarity and ethics that make it possible to transcend the individualistic vision that prevails in education today (De Hevia, 2016).

In addition, Bringle and Hatcher (1996) stated that the increased interest in service learning is an opportunity to engage students in community service, enhance their learning experience, and build reciprocal partnerships between the universities and the community. The authors discussed the implementation of service learning taking into account all the involved parties: educational institutions, students, and the community. The authors pointed out the importance of a responsible citizenship and the need for having clear goals monitoring the service-learning program development, and evaluating institutional outcomes.

The practices that link learning with service enable students to apply in the community what they have learned in class, and at the same time, allow them to gain new skills and knowledge in real contexts. These features develop valuable practices not only for an active citizenship, but also for their integration in the labor market in the future (Tapia, 2010).

According to Swords and Kiely (2010) reflection is a very important step in the process that links learning with service; through reflection, all the people involved can understand the ways that the service-learning program are understood and practiced, and how service-learning courses and programs with community partners are designed and implemented, engaging students in a critical reflective learning that can turn into a transformative learning experience.

Also, research considering different views of service-learning must be taken into account in this study. For example, Mitchell (2008) conducted a study about the differences between traditional service-learning and critical service-learning pedagogy, and their relation to social justice. From a social change perspective, the author included the need for a transformative nature of service-learning that not only brings about an effective practice for the development of students' learning, but also included a pedagogical point of reference that focuses on social responsibility and community concerns.

Research done by Blouin and Perry (2009), showed how some difficulties to successful service-learning programs may arise, mostly related to factors such as student engagement, a poor connection between the curriculum and organizational objectives, and a deficient communication between educational institutions and community partners.

Psycho-ecological systems model and engaged scholarship (PESM)

According to the National Review Board for the Scholarship of Engagement (2016), engaged scholarship includes scholarship in different areas of "teaching, research, and/or service." Its importance lies in that engaged scholarship connects academic work with community needs, aiming to achieve the goal of the faculty and at the same time, meet community needs.

Reeb and Folger (2013) pointed out that the research about community outcomes of service-learning systems is a priority in service-learning research. These authors reviewed different theories, such as Van de Ven's diamond model of engaged scholarship and Bronfensbrenner's (1996) Psycho-ecological systems model (PESM), related to community-based pedagogy such as service-learning. In their work, the authors explained that the conceptual framework of service-learning includes multiple interconnected systems; these systems are significant to understand the service-learning interventions in the community. In

addition, analyzing internal and external factors that influence relationships within different contexts in a reciprocal community can make it easier to measure community outcomes.

Gifre and Esteban (2012) presented the theoretical bases and some current applications to Bonfenbrenner's ecological theory, the Process-Person-Context-Time process and its recent bioecological approach. The authors highlighted some important subjects related to the relationships between social policy and science, the creation of primary and secondary contexts of development, the affective involvement and community intervention. In addition, the authors examined some contributions in psychology and education based on Bronfenbrenner perspective.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) developed seven vectors in their psychosocial theory of student identity development, that includes developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity. This theory focuses on college students, who at the time that start their higher education are found in a state of identity versus confusion, as they are developing and defining themselves; as a result, the university must contribute to the process of development of students to achieve and integral development.

Calleson, Jordan, and Seifer (2005) described community-engaged scholarship and the importance of partnerships with communities, and mentioned that community engagement can take various forms, such as community-based teaching and service-learning research.

These authors suggested a framework for community-engaged scholarship documentation and assessment, in order to support educational institutions commitment and involvement in communities. In addition, in this article the authors pointed out that

community-engaged scholarship is applied to service-learning, as through this pedagogy, knowledge is generated, transmitted and applied in appropriate settings.

Important questions and reflections about engaged scholarship as a participative research that aims to get the perspectives of key stakeholders are discussed by Van de Ven, (2007). According to the author, the knowledge produced by engaged scholarship is deeper and last longer than only researching, and creates a relationship that involves collaboration, mutual respect and negotiation, mutual respect, and collaboration to create a learning community.

Service-learning and emotional connections

It is important to address the relationship between service-learning and emotional connections. According to Carson and Domangue (2013) the emotional connotations of the service-learning experience must be analyzed for all the actors involved in the program. Researchers need to move beyond simply commenting about the important emotional connections in service-learning and start clearly showing how and why emotion is fundamental to service-learning practice.

Modern studies in neuroscience emphasize the connections between emotion and social functioning. For example, Immordino- Yang and Damasio (2007) confirmed this by stating that affection has a preponderant role in education, as learning, attention, memory, decision making, and social functioning, are all affected by the processes of emotion; the authors call these features emotional thought. According to these authors, learning is directly related to emotional connection and social behavior.

The two most important emotions that are related to service-learning are compassion and empathy. According to Langstraat and Bowdon (2011), compassion is an intense social emotion that and involves not only judgment but also action, and requires the understanding

of the suffering of other people and lets us identify with those who suffer, through solidarity and commitment.

Empathy, on the other hand, is internally centered and sets on regions in the brain that are related to automatic affective processes. When individuals were asked to do empathic judgment related to social reasoning, a greater activity was found in the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, the dorsomedial prefrontal cortex, and the medial parietal cortex (Gu, Gao, Wang, Liu, Knight, Hof and Fan, 2012).

For example, Botvinick, Jha, Bylsma, Fabian, Solomon and Prkachin (2005) found that there was a greater activity in the central prefrontal ventromedial cortex when someone else´s suffering, but not with its own pain, which suggests that this region can contribute to additional processes evoked by empathy.

Singer and Lamm (2009) mentioned that there are some components associated with the term "empathy", such as emotional contagion and compassion. Empathy is considered the most important factor when we are sharing affect, and that it lets us recognize what other people feel in a way that we are engaged and we take action to help others. Moreover, there have been found genre differences in the capacity of empathy; for example, in women the areas that are mainly activated are the ones involved in emotional responses, while in men the areas activated are involved in cognitive evaluation, awareness and behavioral anticipation (Derntl, Seidel, Schneider & Habel, 2012). According to Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson (1993), emotional contagion is a phenomenon for personal relationships, because it allows individuals to understand feelings and emotions of others, by presenting emotional reactions automatically and unconsciously during the interaction.

On the other hand, compassion includes both emotion and motivation, since when an individual is aware of another beings suffering, there is a desire to stop the other person's

pain and enhance the individuals' wellbeing. As exposed by in the neuroimaging of compassion, the areas that become active in the brain are the subgenual frontal cortex, the medial frontal cortex, the inferior frontal cortex and the midbrain regions ().

Mirror neurons are considered essential for interpersonal relationships and social interaction and let us internalize and learn from somebody else's feelings and thoughts; moreover, mirror neurons allow us to answer fundamental issues about the capacity of the people to understand other people and themselves, and also to relate effectively to the rest of the world (Immordino- Yang & Damasio, 2007, Ochsner & Lieberman, 2001).

Also, according to Schober and Sabitzer (2013), mirror neurons are directly related to empathy, as they activate when we observe someone performing an action, reproducing the same neural activity equivalent to the action observed, stimulating us to mirror other people´s body language, emotions, gestures and facial expressions (Langstraat & Bowdon, 2011).

The biological connections between learning, emotion, and social functioning, are related also to social behavior, and are supported by the same neurological systems that support decision making. That is why emotion can be considered as a basic form of decision making, and a system to understand why and how people respond the way they do in different situations (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2011).

Service-learning experience in other countries

Service-learning is implemented today as an educational method in higher education institutions around the world. There are a great number of publications that create a body of literature on service-learning activities and outcomes of service-learning in Europe and in the United States; however, there are only a few in Latin America.

As Batlle (2011) pointed out, several countries today are promoting this program as a mandatory course in some high schools and universities, since positive results have been

determined both in terms of school success and as of social commitment for students. For example, in the Netherlands, starting in 2010, students have to complete between 48 and 72 hours of service. Additionally, in the US, 24 % of the schools offer some form of service learning as an educational methodology along with community service, which is also considered a tool for community development.

In Latin America, Argentina is one of the main countries that has implemented service-learning; the law requires students to participate in the service-learning program as an innovative and successful experience for schools. Service-learning not only upholds the motivation in the students' learning process, but it is also an important way of overcoming difficulties and challenges in the development of a service-learning course, improve the communication between institutions and the community, and generate important changes in the society (Batlle, 2011).

Moreover, there is a great theoretical and methodological development of this approach through the Latin American Center of solidarity service-learning (CLAYSS). This center promotes the implementation of service-learning in other countries such as Argentina, and Uruguay, through conferences and research workshops; its main aims are to contribute to its theoretical foundation, to promote dialogue among researchers, and to present the service-learning experiences in the educational field (Rodríguez-Gallego, 2013).

According to Rodríguez-Gallego (2013), in the United States some universities have created service-learning departments as well as research and promotion centers, like the Service-Learning Research and Development Center of the University of California. This center integrates teaching, research and service that aim to connect the curriculum to community needs.

In Spain, the Spanish Service-learning Network based on the values of trust, generosity, cooperation and respect, is an example of a nonprofit association that promotes service-learning and conducts research studies through different projects that aim to benefit students, organizations and the community. Additionally, a study from the University of Sevilla, featured the basic concepts, experiences and research studies related to service-learning, in the national and international field, in order to connect students' learning with community service (Rodríguez-Gallego, 2013).

Another example of service-learning in Spain is found in the study conducted by Lalueza, Sànchez-Busqués, and Padrós (2016) that described the Shere Rom project, an arrangement between public schools in the metropolitan area of Barcelona, Roma communities and the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, presenting the two key elements of Service-learning: promoting social service from the university and encouraging the development of competencies in students while they participate in a project for the community.

In addition, Tapia (2010) presented an outline for the historical background of service-learning in Spain and Latin America. The author also presented definitions of service-learning as pedagogy and as a philosophy that involves central issues such as reflection. Service-learning in Latin America has its own pedagogical roots, and from the Latin-American experience, service-learning aims to consolidate as pedagogy, as practice, and as pathway for local and regional development.

The New England Resource Center for Higher Education (2017) is an institution for community engagement that addresses social justice, inclusion and democracy in change processes in higher education. It is also a center of "inquiry, research, and policy" that aims to support all the parties involved in community engagement to innovate and make changes,

by creating opportunities for learning in higher education.

In Ecuador, only a few universities or schools have implemented the service- learning program as part of their curriculum, where students are required to participate in service-learning courses, combining theory with a specific number of hours of direct service to the community. For example, the Andean Center for Latin American Studies (ACLAS), an organization that provides study abroad programs and research for Latin American language and culture, includes service-learning through social work and reflection among its language and culture programs for foreign students who are learning Spanish, in schools, foundations and non-profit organizations.

Also, Biehl, Duarte, Roccato, Cabrera and Lee (2009), proposed a service-learning program in collaboration with the Ministry of Education (ME), through a technical cooperation that aimed to incorporate service-learning methodology nationwide, and at the same time, evaluate its impact on students learning. This evaluation was done taking into account the academic performance, retention, attitudes and civic competencies and social skills. These authors mention that service-learning experiences in Latin America are recent, and have developed in small-scale. In addition, as the authors state, in 2007 Ecuador started a service-learning pilot program in Quito, Guayaquil and Portoviejo, was implemented by Fundación Educate, that was very successful because it had a great acceptance by the communities. However, the impact of this program was not evaluated in order to measure its impact on students learning, retention or social skills, and moreover, it wasn't assessed to understand its impact on the community and to allow further program development.

Additionally, in 2008, the Ministry of Education Program for Solidarity Schools (Programa Escuelas Solidarias) started a program that combined learning with service, through a complex and innovative proposal, aimed to strengthen students' values and

democracy through research, design and implementation of actions directed to educate the people and contribute to create a more participative community (CLAYSS, 2008).

In the Ecuadorian context, most of higher institutions focus on community service and volunteering, and even though some institutions and organizations have service-learning as part of their academic offer, there is not enough research about service-learning benefits and outcomes for students, or its impact on the community.

Community partner's role in service-learning

One of the most important aspects that have to be considered in service-learning is the connection between the intended objectives to meet the needs of the community, and the outcomes of the service.

Even though the literature on community partners' perspectives provides some indication about the impact of service-learning on the organizations, there are some limitations of existing research. The first thing that needs to be discussed is that most of the literature and research studies that we can be found today, suggest the outcomes for students who participate in service-learning and focus on the perception of the universities; however, only a few studies center their attention on the effects of the service in the community, and most of the information found is anecdotal and descriptive (Cruz & Giles, 2000).

For the reasons mentioned above, the analysis of the underlying assumptions of service-learning outcomes must be analyzed from the point of view of the community partners. For example, Chupp and Joseph (2010) performed a study where they pointed out the elements that should be considered in order to get the most of service-learning in the local community, its members must be engaged as partners, sharing information and resources, and taking part in decision making throughout the process. These authors highlighted the

importance of a good communication between educational institutions and community partners, and mentioned that feedback and assessment are also vital in the process.

Hammersley (2012) described community-based service-learning (CBSL) as an experience that aims to integrate academic goals with organized activities, intended to achieve the goals of community partners. The author also pointed out the lack of practical research into community partner perspectives about the practice of service-learning and its impact, and focused in the importance of taking into account the community partners' involvement within the research.

Another research study was presented by Erickson (2010), who analyzed service-learning through community engagement and community impacts in an outreach university program. In his study, the author expressed his concerns that the community impacts related to service-learning have not been adequately explored in academic literature because the communities do not have a voice. The author suggested that the lack of research about the effects of service-learning in the communities poses the risk of aggravating the problems of the community, instead of serving it positively.

New studies showed that there is a direct connection between community partners' perceptions and service-learning outcomes. Community partners are a source of information since we can have better insights about the effects of service-learning in their organizations from their perspective, so their feedback about the program is very useful in order to make better decisions and improve practice (Twersky, Buchanan & Threlfall, 2013).

Blouin and Perry (2009) discussed that the most important goal of service-learning is to satisfy the needs of the community and work towards local development as a way of benefiting institutions, students and the communities. In spite of the great number of service-learning programs at universities around the world, there is often little attention to the

proposed and actual results of service-learning. This methodology is often implemented focusing on the potential beneficial impact on the students, but little or no emphasis is set on the possible longer-term benefits on those served by the program and the community.

According to Basinger and Bartholomew (2006), in recent years, qualitative and quantitative studies have focused on understanding the value of service-learning from the community partner's perspective and of its impacts in the community. In addition, the authors point out the significance of motivations of the community partners to participate in service-learning, involving emotional connections to all the people involved in the program such as students, educational institutions, and the community.

Based on their research, Stater and Fotheringham (2009) stated the need to create support structures for service-learning programs in universities, in order to motivate the communities to participate in service-learning projects; this way, it will be easier to assess the outcomes of service-learning, such as the level of satisfaction and the impact of service on both the students and the recipients of the service.

Several research studies focus mainly on the service-learning outcomes for students because of their transformative nature, and as Mitchell (2008) suggested, more studies are needed to explain how this pedagogy accomplishes also social change through community engagement. Moreover, future research is needed to explore and assess different perspectives, as a way to determine the impact of service-learning in the community as it has been determined that there is a need to increase civic engagement in students, as a way to bring universities and communities together (Ferrari & Worrall, 2000; d'Arlach, Sánchez & Feuer, 2009). According to these authors, this can be done by listening to the community, starting from the community perspective.

These findings appear to remain true as most of the research has emphasized on reviewing service learning's impact only from the perspective of a student's pedagogical experience and the university's ability to promote service-learning, but not from the perspective of the community partners who are involved in the program and whose opinion must be taken into account in order to make changes and adapt programs where it is needed; in addition, the literature that addresses community outcomes in service-learning is rare and recent; this is why more studies about the perception of community partners are necessary (Littlepage, Gazley & Bennett, 2012; Worrall, 2007).

Service-learning social outcomes

This study aims to explore the impacts service-learning has not only on students' personal and social outcomes, but also on the community partners in the organizations visited. Partnerships should comprise meaningful inputs from the community partners regarding social outcomes, increasing students' social awareness and engagement with the community, and evaluating potential benefits of the service-learning for the community partner's (Basinger & Bartholomew, 2006).

Social outcomes that are a result of an emotional experience are among the central components of service-learning, because emotion creates emotional contagion or interpersonal influence between the students and the beneficiaries of the service. This means that people are able to understand how other person feels, not only through verbal communication but by nonverbal cues, through automatic processes and physiological responses, sharing their emotions implicitly or explicitly (Barsade, 2002).

In a case study at the University of Botswana, that aimed to obtain the feedback of beneficiaries to campaign materials of an advertising and public relations course, most of the interviewees showed a positive position towards the service-learning program. The study

presented the multiple benefits of the service-learning for students, but specified the lack of information in studies and literature, about the perspective of the beneficiaries such as organizations and institutions who took part of the service-learning program (Akpabio, 2012).

In another study, Kahne and Westheimer (1996) described two service-learning projects where they take into account the moral, political, and intellectual goals that motivate service-learning. These projects aimed to improve the community and stimulated students through different educational experiences, so they became active participants who sought to fulfill the needs of a community. The authors explained the significance of service-learning and recognized that it is necessary to promote initiatives at all levels, to develop relationships between the students and the community.

Also, Petri (2015) conducted a study about the interactions between the students and the community partners and its relation to service-learning outcomes. In his study, the author mentioned the importance of reciprocity through mutual learning, and described the experiences of two service-learning programs where transformational learning was fostered towards social change.

Reviewing the literature leads back to the question**:** How do community partners from organizations in Quito, Valle de Los Chillos and Tumbaco perceive the impact of the service-learning program within their organizations?

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

This chapter includes a detailed description of the research methods that were used in this study. Qualitative methods of research were used to answer the given research question. A purposeful sampling strategy was applied through unstructured in-depth interviews to get the information needed for the study that allowed the researcher to get the participants and to have them share details about their perspectives about the impact of service-learning in their organizations (Creswell, 2013).

The main objectives of this study were: (1) to identify the significance of the student's involvement in the local community, from the community partner´s perspective, mainly in the organizations for the care of teenagers, adults and senior citizens; (2) to evaluate the intended and actual results of the service component in the organizations; and (3) to analyze the way different strategies that are used to implement service-learning, shape the perceived impact of the partnership in the community partners.

Justification of study: qualitative methods

This study is based on a phenomenological approach to service-learning. According to Creswell (2013), in a phenomenological study the researcher uses the participant's experiences to identify a phenomenon, through the development of relationships among responses to interpret facts and processes. As McMillan and Schumacher (1997) pointed out, a phenomenological study allows the exploration of an individual's experience within a particular phenomenon.

A qualitative phenomenological research aims to give voice to the participants, so they feel free to speak from their experience about the phenomenon. An emic perspective presents the internal perspective of the participants in a study, and breaks down the interpretation of the meaning, in order to understand their beliefs, values

and motivations (Markee, 2013).

The search for an emic perspective (the participant's point of view) is based on the use of semi-structured interviews in qualitative studies. The open-ended questions allow the participants to speak from their personal perspective toward the issue (Gastaldo & McKeever, 2000).

Participants

A criterion- based sampling was used to select the participants, taking into account three main aspects mentioned by Miles and Huberman (1994): (1) the setting (places selected for the research), (2) the participants (who will be interviewed), and (3) the process (the sequence or steps of the events in the study). The participants were selected among the community partners who take part on the service-learning program with one higher institution in Ecuador, (10, two males and eight females) from organizations in Quito, Cumbaya, and Valle de Los Chillos.

They were all over 30 years of age, and of any sexual orientation, any race or ethnicity. There were no exclusion criteria.

Setting

The study was conducted at non-profit organizations that take part in the service-learning program in order to understand its impact among the beneficiaries of this service.

Access for the interviews was obtained from the personnel who are directly related to the service-learning program in the organizations. Negotiation and compromise were important aspects of the process of gaining entry to the research settings.

Data collection strategies

In order to collect data for this study, the researcher disclosed appropriate information about the purpose of the study, so that the interviewees could make a voluntary choice to accept or refuse to participate. Open-ended questions were asked to explore their views and perspectives towards the service-learning program provided in the organization where they take part. Each interview took from 15 to 30 minutes according to the participant.

The purpose of the interviews (see Appendix A for interview protocol), was to understand the perspectives and insights of community partners towards service-learning in their organizations.

Data collection procedures

Once the respondent was contacted, a convenient location and time for the interview was determined. Interviews were presented using open- ended, probing questions, as a way of engaging and motivating the participants to provide information that they consider important about their experience regarding service-learning in their organization.

During the first part of the interview, the goals of the research were explained in broad terms, and an informal conversation was started, building rapport with each respondent to make them feel confident and relaxed, in order to have an informative exchange of ideas, following the rules of confidentiality and informed consent (See Appendix B).

Once the participants read and signed their informed consent to take part in the study, the researcher started the interviews using follow–up questions to encourage the participants to develop their answers giving as many details as possible; in some cases, the researcher rephrased or reframed the questions, and in order to ensure a proper understanding of the answers, the researcher summarized key ideas back to the interviewee when necessary (Turner, 2010).

Ethical considerations

Ethical issues had to be considered before starting this research study, such as informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality and anonymity.

The first step was to obtain the Institutional Review Board approval at Universidad San Francisco de Quito, in order to start the research. Once the approval was granted the participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the confidential treatment of the data. The researcher presented them the informed consent (see Appendix B) that each respondent signed, and were informed in advance that they were free to withdraw from the study any time.

Data recording procedures

The interviews were recorded and the researcher took notes during the interviews, writing down any important observations. After that, the recordings and notes were transcribed and analyzed to examine the data collected (the experiences, opinions, feelings and thoughts of the recipients of the service, towards the service-learning program provided in their organizations).

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Data analysis and interpretation

The main goal of this study was to understand the community partners' perspectives towards the impact of service-learning in their organizations. This chapter begins by giving details about the way interviews were analyzed from the collected information; next, themes and codes were incorporated to interpret the data, and finally, the interpretation of data was used to determine the conclusions, significance and implications of the findings.

In order to analyze the data from the interviews, a data reduction was made by selecting and extracting patterns and themes from the interviews and field notes (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

After the transcription of the interviews, the information was coded according to ideas, concepts or topics (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The interviews were explored through searching for similarities and differences in themes; next, code names were assigned to the themes identified and organized into categories of shared topics or ideas that surfaced from the participants' perspectives.

Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (Weft QDA) was used to organize, manage and analyze data. This software was designed for the analysis of textual data such as interview transcripts, documents and field notes; it has a set of core features based around coding and retrieving, and once it is installed in a computer, the researcher was able to import interview transcripts, create themes and assign codes to analyze the data. Once the data was added, the categories and analysis were stored in a project file (Fenton, 2006).

A coding process was used to find patterns, label the themes, and locate codes. The central content of the interviews was analyzed to determine what was meaningful in each one, in order to recognize patterns in the qualitative data, and transform them into meaningful

themes (Creswell, 2013).

The participants' responses were classified in four themes about their experiences towards the service-learning in their organizations. In Table 1, the themes were summarized in order to report and interpret findings. The associated concept codes were used to retrieve and organize the information that presented the conclusions in order to analyze the concepts and individual subjects, and find the way these ideas relate among them to develop an integrated account.

The researcher verified the data analysis for generalisability, reliability, and validity, and finally, a report was written to present the findings (Fink, 2000).

Discussion of data

The research question was: How do community partners who work with adults from different non-profit organizations in Quito, Valle de los Chillos and Tumbaco, perceive the impact of the service-learning program in their organizations?

In addition, several clarifying questions were developed. A process of structural coding was applied to represent data related to the research questions from the interviews (Saldaña, 2009).

Using the qualitative data analysis software (Weft QDA), if more than two participants from the organizations responded with similar answers or expressed similar perceptions about the service-learning in their organizations, it was counted as a theme. Four broad themes came forward from the interviews: (1) Students degree of engagement, (2) Advantages of service-learning outweighs the drawbacks, (3) communication and collaboration between the university and organizations is crucial, and (4) social interactions are developed through service-learning (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Themes and associated concept codes*

	Major themes	Associated concept codes
1	Student's degree of engagement and commitment	Students involvement Si Commitment Cm Highly satisfactory HS Community impacts Ci Connecting with communities Cc
2	Advantages and drawbacks of service- learning	Student's contributions Sc Drawbacks Db Inclusion Ic Time commitment Tc Mutual benefit Mb
3	Communication and cooperation	Communication Co Cooperation Cop Partnerships P Feedback Fb Establishment of relationship Er
4	Social interactions	Personal relationships Pr Reflection Rf Interaction It Empathy Em Lack of time Lt Inclusion I

The development of themes as expressed by the community partners provided broad descriptions of their experience with service-learning. The following pages illustrate their perspectives, expressed through the major findings that came out with each theme. The quotes from the participants are included, translated by the author from Spanish to English (the interviews were conducted in Spanish) to let the reader understand the central reflections from the participants' responses.

Student's degree of engagement and commitment

The first theme analyzed the way community partners perceive the experience of the service-learning in general, how the service is provided, and its effectiveness in the

organizations. This theme examined the students' level of engagement and commitment related with intended cognitive, academic, behavioral, and affective outcomes of service-learning from the community partners' perspective.

The overall response to this question by the community partners was very positive; all of the respondents stated that service-learning in their organizations is highly satisfactory. For example, a respondent stated that "in broad terms, the experience with service-learning is positive; the diversity of students who take part of service-learning enriches the organization through their participation; the students who perform the service-learning are highly engaged and committed." (translated by author)

Students actively participate in a variety of experiential learning activities in the organizations, and engage in synergetic exchanges between them and the environment; however, in order to have a learning experience, they have to be actively involved and reflect on the experience, as described by Kolb and Kolb (2005) in their model of experiential learning. On the other hand, Furco (1996) argued that there are differences between service-learning and different forms of experiential learning, since in order to shape the learning experience all the involved must collaborate, focusing on civic engagement and aiming for social change.

Another respondent stated that:

 Service-learning program is really good because it provides a lot of benefits for the organization, such as collaboration from the students in different tasks, and therefore, several community needs are satisfied; in general, students are motivated to learn and collaborate. (translated by author)

Students' involvement is a central element for service-learning, as they do not

volunteer for the service but it is a requirement for graduation; besides, collaboration is relevant to the service as students connect with communities by addressing genuine problems and needs, and thus improving service-learning results.

Engagement and commitment are two key elements in any service-learning program, as the relationship in the partnership becomes transformational; through these elements, students and community partners gain from a mutually beneficial participation and collaboration, while promoting the quality of life in the community.

Another respondent commented that students "are very committed as they have more opportunities to participate; some of the students who participated before in the service-learning, are still coming to do community service." (translated by author)

Through students' participation in the organizations, the community is able to achieve its goals by including valuable human resources; moreover, the students' enthusiasm and perspectives benefit the community and enhance community relations; students get involved in the organizations through their active participation for a meaningful service.

In relation to service-learning as a community engagement pedagogy, (Mitchell, 2008) mentioned that through service-learning, students develop interpersonal skills, improve social responsibility, and have a greater involvement in community through commitment.

Another respondent mentioned that in general:

Service-learning is positive for both the organization and the university, since students not only comply with the organization's requests, but also they become aware of the life conditions of other people, and of the goals of the organization to serve those people. (translated by author)

Service-learning has a further impact when students have the opportunity to engage with direct beneficiaries and other community members in the organizations. From this perspective, it is easier to understand the broader context of social issues and to achieve a real community change.

Another participant mentioned that "The community benefits from the student's participation in different ways; through service-learning students are empowered to actively perform their tasks. Students are engaged and motivated and they contribute in many areas in the organization." (translated by author)

According to one respondent, the opinion of students must also be considered, in order to increase their engagement: "The opinion of students who participate in service-learning in the organization is very important, because of the issues that are under consideration, since students participate and efficiently collaborate in different activities such as inclusion, logistics, and research" (translated by author).

Students' views about the program should be taken into consideration, since their voiced opinions of community problems could allow them to express their fears, doubts and concerns. Encouraging students to be active participants in the organizations, could enhance their learning and at the same time, improve service outcomes from the service-learning experience. Moreover, as Ostrom (2009) mentioned, social and environmental variables that act together within the organizations should be considered, as an ecological phenomenon of the commitment.

All the respondents stated that students' commitment in the organizations benefit the community and has a great significance for community partners' satisfaction. Based on this account, Cruz and Giles (2000) in their study cited several statements about the value of service-learning to communities, and stated that service-learning contributes to community

development through students 'engagement. As it is evident, community partners'

perspective about students' engagement and commitment in the organizations is very

significant, in order to understand the service-learning impact, as students' involvement helps

to achieve the goals the organizations and meet the needs of the community.

Advantages and drawbacks of service- learning

The second theme of the analysis clarified the contributions of the students through

the service-learning, and the elements that facilitate or hinder the development of service-

learning experiences according to the community partners; as Blouin and Perry (2009)

mentioned, the main goal of service-learning is to satisfy the needs of the community,

working towards the benefit of all the people involved in the service.

All the participants reported that students' contributions through service-learning

outweigh any drawbacks; for example, one of the respondents said that: "in general the

usefulness of service-learning is mutual as the organizations gains with the service, and at the

same time, students develop their skills by perform activities that the organization cannot

carry out" (translated by author).

One of the most important advantages of service-learning is that it creates opportunities

both for the students and the organizations to explore mutual interests and develop skills such

as personal efficacy, identity, and to enhance relationships between the organizations and

educational institutions while increasing public awareness of key community issues.

In addition, another respondent mentioned: "Students make an excellent contribution

to the organization; their participation is very significant because they get involved in social

issues and in community service." (translated by author)

According to this community partner point of view, when students participate in

service-learning they engage in meaningful tasks with a specific purpose. They are not

merely spectators but responsible for their actions, they take risks and reflect critically on their experience in the organization.

As all the respondents mentioned, most of the students are enthusiastic and motivated to learn and bring to the organizations new insights, different perspectives, and their knowledge, which contributes to the success of the service-learning experience. This is why it is important to integrate academic goals with selected activities, aimed to achieve the goals of community partners in the organizations (Hammersley, 2012).

Another significant point of view about service-learning is related to the connections that need to be fostered through the students' participation at the beginning of the program. For example, a responded stated that "there must be a start-up phase, where students must have the opportunity to observe and propose how they can help, and not just wait to be directed; this would encourage students to be more engaged and committed." (translated by author)

Relating to the latter, another respondent explained that

Before starting with the service, all students must go to a mandatory induction workshop, where we explain the policy of the organization and the issues that are dealt with; this lets them understand the philosophy and the needs of the beneficiaries of the organization, and later, activities and tasks are assigned and monitored. (translated by author)

For this reason, community partners must provide increased opportunities for students' involvement, in order to engage them in the service from the beginning of the program. When they start their service in an organization, students need to feel involved in the process by increasing their attention and focus in order to have a meaningful experience. In this sense, Chupp and Joseph (2010) discussed the importance of deliberately aiming for

service-learning impact on students, on educational institutions, and on the community in order to get the most of the program.

When asked about what any drawbacks of service-learning, seven out of ten of the respondents answered that some changes should be made related to the service. Community partners suggested that one aspect that should be changed is the time students spend in the organizations; lack of time is a negative issue that has to be considered, as it is a hindrance for the demands and needs of the organizations.

For example, all the interviewees pointed out that as time commitment is an important factor that should be reconsidered, students who participate in service-learning must have the opportunity to spend more time in the organizations, and not just the time that is specified according to the needs of the educational institutions. According to this, one respondent mentioned: "service-learning should be a long- term activity, to give students the opportunity to be more committed to help especially with senior citizens, who need more attention and care". (translated by author)

Another respondent pointed out that:

The hours that students participate in the organization have been restricted, and this is unhelpful; students should have the opportunity to spend more time in the organization, especially during the summer, when we have more users, especially teenagers who are in the summer school break, when we require more assistance, so the time students spend here should be more flexible according to our needs. (translated by author)

Another important aspect that has to be considered, is that four of the respondents believed that it is important to have students who are able to understand, and relate better to each organization through service-learning. For this reason, participants suggested that in

order to have a meaningful service, the students who participate in service-learning must belong to specific majors, such as psychology, sociology, medicine or education.

According to what is mentioned above, a participant pointed out that if the students feel that if their service has a purpose, experience in the organization is more beneficial and "their participation facilitates to fulfill the mission of the organization and is more rewarding for both the organization and the students." (translated by author)

Taken together, these findings suggest that there are a lot of benefits of service-learning as described by another participant, who mentioned that it is mutually beneficial for students and community partners:

> The organization turns into a learning environment, as students get directly in contact with a different reality and learn from it, and on the other hand, the service-learning experience in the organization becomes a link to the community. It is also beneficial for the students, because most of them end up strengthening their identity and their self-esteem. (translated by author)

Reflection is essential in service-learning in order to gain a better understanding of the service-learning context. In view of that, De Hevia (2016) mentioned the significance of the relationship between action and reflection, that allows the integration of skills and meaningful personal and social behaviors; when students work in specific areas, they develop their own competencies and resources that have a greater impact in their professional lives.

It is clear that one of the most important benefits of service-learning is that it increases awareness of societal issues, enhancing students' critical thinking skills. As a result, when they contribute to meeting the needs in the community, they have the opportunity to broaden their perspectives and build a reciprocal partnership with the organizations.

Another advantage of service-learning is that it increases the feeling of community connections and civic responsibility. For instance, one of the respondents mentioned that: "Student's participation is very useful; they collaborate in an area where they must show a positive attitude, as they relate with people who come from a different reality; students support and guide the people who they work with." (translated by author)

By being actively involved in the community, students develop civic responsibility, which allows them to work in community projects aiming for the common good; however, it is not enough to simply involve students in a service experience to help them understand the significance of civic responsibility; its meaning must be related to the learning objectives, and should be purposefully integrated into the service.

Referring to the fact that the students' active participation in the organizations produces better outcomes, Batlle (2011) mentioned that through service-learning students contribute with the environment; they not only participate in activities but also they exercise their democratic skills and their active citizenship. This is not only beneficial for the students, but also their roles and responsibilities as citizens contribute to the development of the community.

Another important standpoint that was analyzed in this theme, was that all the organizations that take part in the service-learning program "should share their experiences and needs in order to collaborate and work together for the community; I believe the service-learning potential is underutilized." (translated by author). For example, this respondent pointed out the importance of conducting workshops for social venture, where students participate with their knowledge, to carry out a study about the real issues of the organization.

This directly relates to what Batlle (2011) stated about service-learning, as an educational and social tool that builds up the relationships between the different stakeholders through dialogue and coordination, for improving the results of the program.

Furthermore, students' participation in the organizations is a key element for the success of service-learning, since students have the opportunity to have their own voices recognized, since their perspectives and points of view are significant in order to improve the program.

According to another respondent, benefits of service-learning include the students' contribution with their knowledge, as their participation "helps the organization to reduce costs; there are more helping hands in the organizations and contribute with their knowledge and active participation." (translated by author)

In service-learning, students work closely with a special needs population, and even though they do not have experience, students will collaborate better with their knowledge and better understanding of the issues that are dealt with in the organizations and as a result, achieve better outcomes through the service. In addition, they will be able to gain a better understanding of other people's circumstances, along with a greater appreciation of their own skills.

Respondents were asked to suggest other changes for service-learning in their organizations and one of them mentioned that: "We would like to request that students who come to our organization are from careers such as education, psychology, etc., so they should be able to contribute with their knowledge and apply what they already know." (translated by author).

If undergraduate psychology or education students have more opportunity to participate in the service, they are able to improve their personal, academic, and professional

outcomes; moreover, students contribute with their personal expertise and the strengths of their academic disciplines, by applying them to the service in collaboration with the guidance of the organizations.

According to Eyler and Giles (1997), the students´ experiences and perceptions make a difference; from the analysis of the results, it is clear that students in the organizations were able to make connections with their personal and academic development, and through these connections, they were able to apply this new knowledge according to their majors.

The main element of service-learning is reciprocity; reciprocal partnerships are the result of a mutual transformation and collaboration; partnerships entail a relationship of sharing, trust, cooperation and mutual respect. Regarding this, one of the respondents stated that "The service-learning program is reciprocal since it is a space that fosters students' development and at the same time, and serves the organization." (translated by author)

The same respondent mentioned that in order to get the most of this reciprocal relationship, the university should consider establishing professional training after the service-learning, in order to assess the final results, and to provide continuity of the program. The respondent pointed out that a continuous collaboration between the university and the organization is beneficial, as it would have a greater impact in the community, through consensus-building and mutual support in the future.

Reciprocity is crucial for any service-learning program, even though it might not be obvious; apart from the implicit exchange between students and the community partners, visible elements of exchange and mutual recognition are needed for the program success (Bushouse, 2005).

Additionally, reciprocity is directly related to scholarship of engagement that involves educational institutions and community partners in a reciprocal partnership, aiming for a

mutually beneficial exchange of resources and knowledge; also, engaged scholarship integrates communities' issues with teaching, service and research.

Engaged scholarship includes different elements that are necessary for all related parties in service-learning; in fact, Van de Ven (2007) stated that through engaged scholarship relationships are created, where collaboration, negotiation and mutual respect are key elements for social transformation.

All of the respondents stated that service-learning is an interesting project that makes possible the connection between organizations, the community and educational institutions; this program has enabled the organizations to extend their network of relationships and find new alternatives to make better decisions.

Finally, from the community partner's perspective, it is necessary to focus attention on those aspects that must be considered as part of developing an effective relationship, through a purposeful reciprocity; and as Bringle and Hatcher (1996) pointed out, service-learning provides students with opportunities to engage in community service improving their learning experience and building reciprocal partnerships, and at the same time, the organizations have a possibility to share their beliefs, convey their goals, and improve their communication with institutions and with other organizations.

Communication and collaboration

One of the most important themes that emerged was that of the communication between the educational institutions and community partners. Through communication, community partners' perspectives can be understood; moreover, roles and responsibilities can be clarified in order to establish partnerships, as service-learning involves a reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationship with the community partners, who value their participation in the educational process (Sandy & Holland, 2006).

Additionally, collaboration through engaged scholarship integrates communities' issues with teaching, service and research; it includes different elements that are necessary for all related parties in service-learning. The impacts of service-learning in the organizations can be determined, by the efforts of the educational institutions and organizations that encourage and uphold change in the communities.

According to Chupp and Joseph (2010), the elements that should be considered in order to get the most of service-learning are mutual engagement, shared information and resources, and joint decision making throughout the process; these elements are essential in order to communicate effectively and to meet the needs of the community.

In fact, a common view amongst interviewees was that in order to have a successful relationship between the university and community partners, an increased focus should be placed on an ongoing dialogue between the educational institutions and the organizations, to understand the points of view of all those involved in the service-learning program. This could be very part of a reflection stage about the significant issues and objectives of each organization.

In all cases, the informants reported that "communication between the organization and the university is crucial; the students' participation in the organization is essential, in view of the fact that they get involved in social issues and carry out community service." (translated by author)

When participants were asked about their perspective about the most important factors for creating and maintaining a successful partnership between a community organization and the university, all of them responded that communication is the key element that has to be considered.

Another important issue that came to light, related to communication between

community partners and the university is feedback. Six of the respondents mentioned that feedback is an important factor for communication that enables the assessment of the effectiveness of service-learning in the organizations. All of the respondent mentioned that feedback should be provided effectively and constructively at the end of the service, as a way to identify necessary changes that should be made in the service, and outcomes that would evidence if the service has met the expectations of the organizations.

In order to answer the research question, the community partners' perspective has been considered as a fundamental source of information about the impact of service-learning in their organizations; however, as most of all the respondents pointed out, feedback from all involved must be included, in order to make better decisions and improve service-learning practice (Twersky, Buchanan & Threlfall, 2013).

This view was echoed by another informant who mentioned that "greater involvement is needed from the university since it is not enough to fill out forms, that is why we need to have a mutual feedback." (translated by author)

Moreover, the comment below illustrates this perspective about feedback and communication between the institutions and the organizations:

There should be more communication, assessment and feedback from all the people

involved in service-learning. It should be organized by the university for example,

how does it feels about the development of the program in each organization, and at

the same time, the community partners' perspective should be considered towards the

service-learning. (translated by author)

For instance, a respondent stated that the university should create spaces where debates and discussions between the university and community partners could take place, to find ways to analyze new possibilities and improve the program. When discussing about

improving partnership between the university and the organizations, the respondent pointed out that "it is important to have more participation with the university and among organizations, and for this purpose we could produce corporate videos, where the philosophy, standards and aims of each organization could be presented." (translated by author)

Sustainable partnerships in service-learning can be developed by incorporating the community partner´s perspective through feedback and a closer communication, to work collaboratively as a way to "enhance the quality of services." (Blouin & Perry, 2009, p.125)

For instance, another respondent stated that feedback from the students should also be considered as it has been pointed out before, since it can be useful to determine if the goals of the organization have been met according to the student's perspective. As the respondent mentioned, "Some of the students direct and guide their objectives to the needs of the organization according to its parameters." (translated by author)

Therefore, it is clear that a critical element of service-learning is students' communicative skills. Through service-learning students provide a necessary service for a specific area in the community, in partnership with different nonprofit organizations. As a result, students improve their communication and interaction skills.

Moreover, almost two-thirds of the participants said that a greater involvement from the university is needed, and that feedback from the community partners is needed more often in relation to the service-learning. A respondent stated that "it would be more enriching to have a long term mutual assessment of the service-learning process." (translated by author)

Another important implication of communication between the community partners and the university is that some respondents mentioned the importance to create bonds for a mutual benefit. For example, as one interviewee put it, "in order to have a more reciprocal relationship, the university should have more participation and take advantage of the services

in the organization, creating awareness campaigns that are very important to understand the community issues." (translated by author)

For all the participants, service-learning is a reciprocal activity since it generates a mutual benefit; through service-learning students have a great impact in the organizations and at the same time, they develop skills and comply with a requirement for their academic performance.

The most interesting aspect of this theme is that according to another respondent, a successful partnership is the result of the willingness to collaborate from all sides: from the students who provide service, the organization by guiding them and giving them the opportunity to learn by experience, and from the university by maintaining constant monitoring and communication.

According to Oppe (2001) there is "a strong connection between service learning and communication" (p.30). Service learning programs develop partnerships that depend on communication among all the involved to be successful. Promoting dialogue fortifies communication, as the needs of the community are addressed and the expectations of community partners are expressed clearly.

What stands out about communication, is that several respondents pointed out the importance of having a direct exchange of ideas with the educational institutions, as the student's participation in the organizations is brief and a lot of human potential is lost, so it would be better if students could participate for longer periods of time. According to some respondents, through service-learning it is possible to foster social awareness and ethics in the students, who can have a real connection with social issues and make a difference in the community.

For example, an interviewee stated that "We would like to have a consolidated team to work in one coordinated project in the organization at a time; however, we depend on the time allotted for student's participation, their careers and schedules." (translated by author)

The most interesting aspect of this is that some of the respondents agreed on the need for more presence of the educational institutions in the organizations, in order to implement strategies to overcome the challenges that service-learning may pose.

For example, Blouin and Perry (2009) highlighted that there may be some difficulties and challenges to address in service-learning related to specific central factors, such as a low level of students' involvement, an inadequate connection between the curriculum and organizational goals, and specifically, a poor communication between institutions and community partners.

As it is clear, a recurrent theme in the interviews was that a highest level of communication is needed among all the participants in service-learning: students, educational institutions and community partners. The university and the organizations should work together to provide workshops on health matters for senior citizens, and to carry out other activities that would be useful to raise awareness of social and economic differences.

The perspectives of community partners towards the impact of service-learning in their organizations evidence the possibility to create networks of collaboration and solidarity, through a permanent dialogue between the community partners and the university to wield a real social compromise.

Social interactions

This study has raised important questions about the nature of social relationships between the students, the beneficiaries of the service and the community partners. Overall, this study strengthens the idea that students' involvement in service-learning creates bonds

between all the involved; working with people who are immersed in a social issue, can provide students with a wider vision and let them develop communicative skills.

This theme illustrated the relational dynamics that are developed between the students and community partners through service-learning, and that are a key element that has a great significance in the success of the program in the organizations; these dynamics are related to the environments where students interact, such as their homes, schools, and the community; therefore, the service-learning experience is connected to the ecological context that explains how the students perceive the environment and how long-term changes are generated through the interaction with the different environments.

There has been an emergent interest to understand the processes of change and development in the individual, and how these processes are related to the interaction among groups and organizations, as the different environments that surround the individual have a direct or indirect influence in his development.

The ecological systems explained by Bronfenbrenner (1996), improved the understanding of the way students relate to the different environments in which they are involved through service-learning. The main environments that are related to service-learning are the mesosystem, where two or more environments interrelate, like the family and the school; and the macrosystem, that involves the interrelation with the community, where a constant exchange of energy and information is produced.

In addition, psychosocial development theorists explained that students' development is related to their interaction with the environment. In their psychosocial model of student development, Chickering and Reisser's (1993) pointed out that students develop their competence in several areas, acknowledge emotions, become more independent, and develop mature interpersonal relationships through their service-learning experience.

In this study a variety of perspectives were expressed about the importance of social interactions in service-learning for all the actors involved; a common view amongst interviewees was that service-learning has generated long-term results in their organizations that are not necessarily academic; there is a significant benefit for both the beneficiaries and the students through the relationships that are generated.

Two reasons emerged from this: first, as students are directly related with the beneficiaries in the organizations, ties are formed and one of the main emotions that emerge is empathy. Second, respondents were unanimous in stating that the human factor is crucial for the service, since different social skills are developed as a result of the social relations created through the service.

The role of emotion in service-learning facilitates the intellectual and personal development of students, and emphasizes the need for the organizations to help them handle and integrate these emotions with the service through social interactions; there are a lot of benefits created by the social interaction between students and the users in the organizations.

For instance, a participant mentioned that:

Students have taken part in the service-learning program for around ten years and we have seen that the beneficiaries, who come to the organization looking for support, feel more confident, are able to form bonds and establish healthier relationships among them and with others. (translated by author)

Regarding relationships, Barsade (2002) outlines that emotion creates *emotional contagion* or interpersonal influence in the relationships between the students and direct beneficiaries of the service, turning service-learning into an emotional experience, that fosters social relations and students' development.

The exchange that results from the social interaction that takes place in the organizations between the students, the staff and the beneficiaries, affects emotion and cognition; moreover, as service-learning is a pedagogy that encompasses a reciprocal interaction between learning and service, emotional experiences specific to service-learning must be taken into account such as compassion and empathy.

As Langstraat and Bowdon (2011) mentioned, "Emotions, rather than being limited to individual and private experiences, are socially constructed and experienced" (p.2). According to these authors, service-learning enhances students' emotional development through social relationships with the beneficiaries of the service, developing emotions such as empathy and compassion.

Students' participation in service-learning brings about emotional experiences that result from the social interactions that are directly developed in the organizations. When asked about emotions such as empathy and compassion, the participants were unanimous in the view that these emotions are essential for understanding others.

In addition, students who participate in service-learning, need emotional support since they are involved in new and challenging settings that are new to them, and where all kinds of emotions are generated; students need to feel safe and confident to share their feelings and insights (Eyler & Giles, 1999, p. 185).

Respondents were asked to point out the ways the activities that students perform through the service-learning cater for the needs of the beneficiaries in their organizations, and all of them mentioned the significance of social interaction. In all cases, the informants reported that through social interactions "beneficiaries feel more confident, they are willing to interact with the students, and empathy is developed." (translated by author)

According to neuroscience, empathy and compassion are emotions that have been identified in circuits on the brain, that activate specific neurons called *mirror neurons,* since they mirror the actions or behaviors of others, and may help to understand how and why we feel these emotions for other people (Immordino- Yang & Damasio, 2007).

This study has shown that through service-learning, a personal relationship is built between the students and the beneficiaries in the organizations, and this result in the development of emotions such as empathy and compassion; however, as one respondent stated, this also poses some challenges for the organizations because students have to deal with different and new experiences, and sometimes they don't know how to cope with them.

As reported in neuroscience studies by Immordino- Yang and Damasio (2007) there is a direct connection between emotion and social functioning; the processes of emotion have a great impact on affective development and on social functioning. In addition, emotional connections are essential elements of service-learning, as social interaction brings forth emotional and behavioral responses (Carson & Domangue, 2013).

More than half of the respondents commented that when students face a different reality than what they are used to, they develop social skills and relationships that are beneficial not only for them but for the community partners. For example, a participant said that students become aware of important elements for service-learning, such as **"**partnerships, social relationships, inclusion, and new understanding about what a disability really is." (translated by author)

This respondent added that the students and the beneficiaries of the service break social barriers through the development of emotions like empathy understand each other from a different perspective and respect and appreciate their differences.

In the Biopsychosocial Model, developed by Kiesler (2000), several internal factors, such as vulnerability, resiliency and development; and external factors, such as risk and protective factors, influence an individual's physical, mental, and emotional well-being. These internal and external factors are part of community issues and the interaction among these factors produce specific outcomes for the students, the direct beneficiaries of the service and community partners.

Handling emotions may be a challenge, since students face a different reality and they need to learn how to cope with different emotions. Sometimes they may feel vulnerable or not know how to react or respond to specific situations related to their service in the organizations. To this regard, a respondent mentioned that it is important to prepare students before the service, setting parameters and supporting them throughout the process, because:

At first, most of the students who come to our organization don't know what to do, feel lost and have to face a wide range of emotions and feelings, such as fear, compassion and confusion; however, we have seen that these emotions move them to go further and give more from them. (translated by author)

An important point of view about social interactions is that the direct beneficiaries, such as teenagers and elderly adults meet other people, their social circle opens which is very positive for them, since they build relationships and lose their fears; both the students and the beneficiaries learn to relate to each other, and students understand better the people with disabilities and learn to relate better with them.

Another interviewee when asked about the social relations that are developed in the organization through service-learning said:

It is really beneficial for the staff and for the direct beneficiaries of the community. The elderly who come to this organization are flattered and cared for by the students.

It is a great experience because the senior citizens grow fond of the students and show affection. (translated by author)

Ninety percent of those who were interviewed indicated that social interactions are directly beneficial for the beneficiaries of the service, as students provide them personalized care, and as a result, ties are formed; as another respondent pointed out, students are seen as role models and develop important social and personal skills such as self-esteem, and they improve academically.

The evidence suggests that service-learning allows the creation of connections among all those involved, and emotions and understanding are developed. Students who perform the service are able to understand better different issues related to inclusion, diversity and human rights. According to three respondents, when some of the students start their service in an organization, they perceive community service as charity; however, when but they get involved in the actual service, they realize that it is necessary to understand concepts of equality and human rights.

Another respondent pointed out that:

Users are very motivated to come to the foundation because they are encouraged by the students who perform the service. They feel supported, develop social skills and ties. When the students are here, they even prefer to stay at the organization and spend time with the students than going home. In addition, the same respondent mentioned that "some of the students perform different activities in the organization that are an opportunity for the users to develop affective, emotional, and academic skills, so these activities benefit the group and the community. (translated by author)

According to eight of the participants, social interaction must be particularly emphasized in service-learning. Social relations develop skills that are essential for building relationships, for developing positive self-esteem, and for acceptance into our community.

Another respondent stated that social interaction is vital in their organization as they work with people who suffer from severe disabilities of most of the users; they are not able to move or interact with other people outside their closest family and the staff in the organization. For this reason, inclusion is very important, and mutual affective bonds are created. Students establish affective relationships not only with the beneficiaries but with the staff in the organizations.

In the Ecological Systems Model proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1996), community members are influenced by interdependent systems where interpersonal relations are built in a given setting. It is important to consider the circumstances of an individual's development, considering environmental influences and external forces that may affect this complex system of relationships.

It is clear that a positive social interaction enables effective communication and builds positive relationships and friendships. As all the respondents mentioned, through service-learning students create an impact in the organizations by bringing changes that are beneficial for the community partners. For example, one respondent said that

> There have been evident changes in the organization thanks to the service-learning, because the patients receive a benefit that allows them to improve their lives. They feel sheltered and supported in the organization. The students are a key element for the organization's structure and their participation is fundamental for the service, so they develop important mutual relationships that enrich the community. (translated by author)

Through the different social interactions that are part of the service, beneficiaries engage in academic and recreational environments where they develop personal and social skills; they are able to general bonds, to think critically and to play, so they prefer to stay at the organization practicing different types of activities such as art or sports, motivated to by the students' service.

A participant stated that "beneficiaries of the service are happy to relate with other people outside their closer social circle. Most of our beneficiaries need physical therapy, that can be uncomfortable and even painful, so affective relationships are very helpful during the therapy." (translated by author) According to this participant, there is evidence that the beneficiaries of the service develop trust and self-confidence when doing the physical therapy with them, they strive to perform their physical therapy exercises, and at the same time, students are able to learn and practice through the direct contact with the beneficiaries.

As Giles and Eyler (1994) stated, service learning has a positive effect on interpersonal development, while fostering collaboration and communication skills and the ability to work well with others, making the most of this learning experience for all partners.

As a final point, from the community partners' perspective, social interaction is crucial to develop fundamental elements that are needed to develop effective relationships, such as inclusion, empathy and collaboration, and service-learning.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

This chapter explored the findings presented in Chapter 4 by considering key concepts and analysis based on the theoretical perspective, including the main elements of service-learning (experiential learning, reflection, engagement, social interaction).

The research question of this study was: How do community partners who work with adults from different non-profit organizations in Quito, Valle de los Chillos and Tumbaco, perceive the impact of the service-learning program provided by the university in their organizations? There are three main conclusions that can be drawn from the present study and that answer the research question: (1) all community partners who were interviewed pointed out that service-learning is mutually beneficial, as it has advantages not only for the students who take part, but also for the direct beneficiaries of the service, and therefore for the community partners; (2) The results provided important insights about the importance of reciprocity and the elements that are required to have a successful partnership between community partners and organizations, such as a clear communication, shared responsibilities and collaboration, positive relationships, and respect for different values; and (3) the need for further research of service-learning outcomes through engaged scholarship.

(1) The data analyzed showed that the community partners are highly satisfied with service-learning and mention the importance of achieving a high degree of motivation and engagement from all the involved parties in this experience. Students are a key element in the service, and as Furco (2005) states, students are protagonists and feel empowered to develop attitudes and skills in the process; according to Chupp and Joseph (2010) in order to get the determine the impact of service-learning in the community, partnerships must be created by sharing information and resources, and making decisions for the mutual benefit.

(2) These findings enhanced our understanding that through service-learning reciprocal partnerships are created and relationships are developed that result in mutual transformation and cooperation for both sides. This research has shown that through service-learning, the organizations are able to provide students with environments of authentic experiences related to academic content that encourage critical thinking, problem-solving, and the application of knowledge through academic curriculum integration; in addition, through service-learning, there is a great cognitive and emotional development not only in students but also in the beneficiaries of the service, because of the influence of the social environment (Immordino-Yang and Damasio, 2007).

As it has been outlined in the literature review, there has been an emergent interest to understand the processes of change and development in the individual and how it is related to the interaction among groups and organizations, as the different environments that surround the individual have a direct or indirect influence in his development.

The Process-Person- Context-Time (PPCT) theory, within the ecological systems theory, strengthens other values such as affectivity and sociability, and is helpful to conceptualize environmental contexts, by understanding the role of the individual in reciprocal interactions in service-learning, in a specific period of time.

The environment has a great influence in the emotions that are the result of social interactions, relationships, and social behavior in general. Social interaction can be understood from the framework of neuroscience, specifically mirror neurons; these neurons allow individuals to internalize and relate with somebody else's feelings and emotions and therefore understand other people, and are directly related to emotion and empathy (Ochsner & Lieberman, 2001).

Students also rely on a structured time for reflection, and are provided with opportunities to develop and apply their skills in extended learning possibilities; through the service, students also develop a sense of caring for others by means of their active participation in the organizations, focusing on community needs.

Service-learning, and thereby engaged scholarship, is built upon reciprocal partnership; the participation of all the involved parties is encouraged in order to have a broader engagement and a more active democracy and understanding of others.

These findings imply that social interactions between students and community partners in the organizations are directly related to the outcomes of service-learning (Petri, 2015). These interactions between the students and the environment are encouraged through the relationships that are created in every context, and produce emotions such as empathy and compassion that are important in service-learning. (3) The results of this study show that service-learning benefit community partners with the contribution of student's service in their organizations, meeting community needs and helping achieve organizational goals; in addition, through service-learning, organizations can increase public awareness of key social and health issues.

Through the analysis of results, we can conclude that in order to build stronger relationships, the organizations would like to have a closer interaction with the educational institutions in the future, in order to implement strategies to overcome the challenges and improve the program; in addition, community partners' feedback is very important; feedback is necessary to improve practice and to make the better decisions about the program (Twersky, Buchanan & Threlfall, 2013).

A recurrent theme in the interviews was that a highest level of communication is needed among all the participants in service-learning: students, educational institutions and

community partners. Moreover, community partners' participation and their implication in the service-learning experience are fundamental elements for an effective service-learning implementation.

Moreover, educational institutions must work towards collaborative agreements with the organizations to share ideas, submit proposals and assess the impact of the service-learning programs for the students, the faculty, the organizations and the community.

Overall, these results indicate that a very important criterion for an assessment of service-learning should be its impact on community partners. As it has been pointed out, the impact of service-learning on student academic achievement has been well documented; however, the impact service-learning has on the organizations has been largely neglected.

Finally, from the community partners' perspective, service-learning has a positive effect on reducing stereotypes and prejudice, and foster inclusion and understanding. In addition, it has a positive effect on social responsibility, citizenship skills, and commitment to service

To conclude, community partners' perspectives can create opportunities to overcome program challenges. Organizations and educational institutions must work together to improve service-learning implementation, emphasizing the advantages of community engagement.

Limitations of the study

The first limitation of this study was the sampling size, as there are not many organizations in Ecuador that take part of service-learning projects. A second limitation was a lack of follow up interviews for the participants, since some aspects of community partners' perspectives of service-learning might have been drawn out in one single interview.

A third limitation to this study was participant bias; when it was suspected that participants were expressing what they thought was expected from them, confidentiality of the study was emphasized, stressing that there would not be any connection between their names or organization to findings in the study.

Recommendations for future research

The present study should prove to be particularly valuable to contribute to understanding the main elements of service-learning's success that are necessary to consider from the community partners' perspective. This research has shown the need for feedback and assessment during and after the service-learning program; in addition, educational institutions must work towards collaborative agreements with the organizations to share ideas, submit proposals and assess the impact of the service-learning from the point of view of all parties involved: students, teachers, and community partners, in order to understand service-learning outcomes mainly concerning reciprocity (Godfrey, Illes & Berry, 2005).

Service-learning is a pedagogy that becomes even more significant when it is connected to other subjects. Service-learning projects are an option to focus on different interdisciplinary subjects. It is important to work with interdisciplinary service-learning projects, where students who study careers related to education or psychology may have the opportunity to take part and contribute with their knowledge and better understanding of community issues.

Finally, continuing research on community partners' perspective about the impact of service-learning in the organizations appears fully justified to detect the elements that contribute to an adequate implementation of service-learning future experiences, since at present, it can be assumed that the potential of service-learning as a means for achieving a

mutually benefiting relationship between educational institutions and the community has yet to be further studied in Ecuador.

A particularly important recommendation that would be valuable for future practice is the creation of evaluation criteria and indicators for outcomes that may contribute to best practices in service-learning. These evaluation criteria could provide key elements that will guide and offer an assessment framework for service-learning experiences, and to foster the implementation of this pedagogy and promote its qualification and significance as and an innovative learning practice (Tapia, 2010).

In order to assess service-learning's outcomes, it would be important to use rubrics for measuring civic engagement, students' service learning performance, and community partners' perspectives and attitudes on several issues connected to their experience as a community site for a service-learning program. Issues assessed could include different indicators, such as (1) the community partners' point of view on the impact and relevance of service-learning they have perceived in their organizations, (2) their motivations to participate with educational institutions in service-learning programs, (3) their perception about the roles and responsibilities of those involved, and (4) the level of community involvement and significant impact of partnerships.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of service-learning from the community partners' perspective in different organizations and represents a novel contribution to the service-learning program, since there aren't any studies known about the impact of service-learning in organizations in Ecuador.

This research is based on a phenomenological study, where four significant themes were analyzed, that led us to reflect about service-learning in the organizations by integrating

the voice of the community, allowing us to understand better the significance of reciprocity through meaningful service, systematic reflection, and the need to foster civic responsibility and appreciation of diversity.

In depth interviews where used in this research to collect information, aiming to understand the overall perceptions and points of view of community partners about essential issues such as engagement, collaboration, communication and reciprocity. One of the more significant findings that emerged from this study is that in the Ecuadorian context, the development of service-learning has aimed and achieved to improve the lives of the community, through the participation of the educational institutions and the organizations, showing a high level of students' engagement and commitment. This has been done by fostering social interactions and social responsibility.

An assessment of service-learning experiences should be considered by all the parties involved. Students must evaluate their own participation in the project through self-assessment; educational institutions that have guided its application, should assess the students' participation and learning outcomes; and community partners should evaluate if the needs of the community have been met throughout the process; by doing so, all the people involved in service-learning could make informed decisions to make substantial changes, improvements, and adaptations to the program.

It is important to point out that the rise of service-learning initiatives today, poses significant challenges for the successful implementation of the program, due to social issues and elements that need to be emphasized such as democracy, equity, responsibility and social cohesion.

Service-learning offers an alternative for social inclusion and engaged scholarship, that considers the development of a participative and democratic culture, and aims to awaken

the interest in students to participate actively in the community, promoting mutual

understanding and dialogue.

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APPENDIX A:

Interview protocol

What is the impact of the participation of the students of the service-learning program on the community partners?

1. Tell me about your experience with the service-learning project (provide details if necessary).

    a. Are services provided in a timely manner?

    b. How effective do you think the program is?

    c. What are some of the benefits of the service- learning that you see appearing in the community? Please elaborate.

    d. How do the activities of the service-learning program cater for the needs of different age-groups, sexes, and social classes within your community?

2. In what ways do students actively contribute through the service they perform in your organization? How is the students' involvement regarding your organization?

    a. What changes have you seen in the organization through service-learning?

    b. From the perspective, what do you think are the benefits of this program for women / men /young people and your communities?

    c. How are the program implementers working with you to determine in order to determine your needs?

3. How are you participating in the implementation of the program and in checking that it is progressing well (monitoring and evaluation processes)?

    a. If you could have the opportunity, what changes would you make? How would you improve it?

    b. How do you share your feedback or feelings about the services/activities you are receiving, with the project/program implementers? How often?

    c. What would you like to be done in this project/program, for it to be of greater benefit to your community?

    d. From your perspective, how would you describe the benefits of the partnership?

4. Is there an increase in the number of people in this community whose lives have been changed as a result of benefiting from the program?

    a. Do you consider that your experience has been positive? In what ways?

    b. Is there a positive life story that you can share with us?

    c. In your opinion, is this program creative and innovative, different from other projects?

    d. What do you think were the most significant community impacts? Can you explain any further?

    e. What do you think are the most important factor for creating and maintaining a successful partnership between a community organization and the university?

    f. Are there any other comments you would like to make about the community impacts of this project? What would you do differently? What might the university do differently?

APPENDIX B

Comité de Ética de Investigación en Seres Humanos
Universidad San Francisco de Quito
El Comité de Revisión Institucional de la USFQ

The Institutional Review Board of the USFQ

Formulario Consentimiento Informado

Título de la investigación: El impacto del programa de service-learning desde la perspectiva de los beneficiarios de las organizaciones

Organización del investigador: Universidad San Francisco de Quito

Nombre del investigador principal: María Avelina López Torres

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Co-investigadores: Ninguno

DESCRIPCIÓN DEL ESTUDIO
Introducción *(Se incluye un ejemplo de texto. Debe tomarse en cuenta que el lenguaje que se utilice en este documento no puede ser subjetivo; debe ser lo más claro, conciso y sencillo posible; deben evitarse términos técnicos y en lo posible se los debe reemplazar con una explicación)*
Usted ha sido invitado a tomar parte de este estudio sobre el impacto del programa de aprendizaje y servicio en la institución en la que usted participa. Puede tomarse su tiempo para decidir si desea o no participar de este estudio y si decide participar va a recibir una copia de este formulario. Puede realizar todas las preguntas que desee antes de comenzar. Igualmente, si no desea responder a alguna pregunta puede no hacerlo.
Propósito del estudio (incluir una breve descripción del estudio, incluyendo el número de participantes, evitando términos técnicos e incluyendo solo información que el participante necesita conocer para decidirse a participar o no en el estudio)
El programa de aprendizaje y servicio tiene entre sus objetivos la satisfacción de las necesidades de la comunidad y la promoción del aprendizaje-servicio como estrategia de desarrollo local. Este estudio nos va a permitir conocer cuál es el impacto del programa de aprendizaje y servicio en los beneficiarios del programa, y en general en la comunidad en donde se aplica.
Descripción de los procedimientos (breve descripción de los pasos a seguir en cada etapa y el tiempo que tomará cada intervención en que participará el sujeto)

Nos interesa saber su opinión sobre el programa de aprendizaje y servicio en su organización.

-La participación en este estudio es voluntaria, y si usted decide participar, se le va a realizar una entrevista personal en donde se presentan varias preguntas abiertas.

-Estas preguntas no tienen respuestas correctas o incorrectas, y no está obligado /a a responder todas las preguntas si no lo desea hacer.

-Puede hacer preguntas en cualquier momento durante su participación. Si alguna de las preguntas de la entrevista le parece incomoda o no la desea responder, usted tiene el derecho de hacérselo saber al investigador o de no responderla.

-Igualmente, se puede retirar en cualquier momento sin que eso le perjudique de ninguna manera.

Riesgos y beneficios (explicar los riesgos para los participantes en detalle, aunque sean mínimos, incluyendo riesgos físicos, emocionales y/o sicológicos a corto y/o largo plazo, detallando cómo el investigador minimizará estos riesgos; incluir además los beneficios tanto para los participantes como para la sociedad, siendo explícito en cuanto a cómo y cuándo recibirán estos beneficios)

No existe ningún riesgo físico por participar en este estudio. Si se siente nervioso o ansioso con respecto a alguna de las preguntas de la entrevista, puede elegir responderla o no. Entre los beneficios de participar en este estudio están el conocer mejor cual es el resultado del programa de aprendizaje y servicio para su organización, y esto nos ayudaría a establecer qué acciones podríamos tomar para realizar mejoras en el futuro con respecto a este programa.

Confidencialidad de los datos *(se incluyen algunos ejemplos de texto)*

Para nosotros es muy importante mantener su privacidad, por lo cual aplicaremos las medidas necesarias para que nadie conozca su identidad ni tenga acceso a sus datos personales:

1) La información que nos proporcione se identificará con un código que reemplazará su nombre y se guardará en un lugar seguro donde solo el investigador y la directora de este estudio tendrán acceso.

2) Su nombre no será mencionado en los reportes o publicaciones.

3) El Comité de Bioética de la USFQ podrá tener acceso a sus datos en caso de que surgieran problemas en cuando a la seguridad y confidencialidad de la información o de la ética en el estudio.

Derechos y opciones del participante (se incluye un ejemplo de texto)

Usted puede retirarse en cualquier momento de la investigación. Su participación en este estudio es voluntaria, es decir, usted puede decidir NO participar. Si usted decide participar, puede retirarse del estudio en cualquier momento. Para hacerlo debe ponerse en contacto con la investigadora de este estudio. No habrá sanciones ni pérdida de beneficios si usted decide no participar, o si decide retirarse del estudio antes de su conclusión.

Información de contacto

Si usted tiene alguna pregunta sobre el estudio por favor llame a María Avelina López, a los siguientes teléfonos: 2863 252 / 0969012309, o envíe un correo electrónico a malopezt@estud.usfq.edu.ec

Si usted tiene preguntas sobre este formulario puede contactar al Dr. William F. Waters, Presidente del Comité de Bioética de la USFQ, al siguiente correo electrónico: comitebioetica@usfq.edu.ec

Consentimiento informado *(Es responsabilidad del investigador verificar que los participantes tengan un nivel de comprensión lectora adecuado para entender este documento. En caso de que no lo tuvieren el documento debe ser leído y explicado frente a un testigo, que corroborará con su firma que lo que se dice de manera oral es lo mismo que dice el documento escrito)*

Comprendo mi participación en este estudio. Me han explicado los riesgos y beneficios de participar en un lenguaje claro y sencillo. Todas mis preguntas fueron contestadas. Me permitieron contar con tiempo suficiente para tomar la decisión de participar y me entregaron una copia de este formulario de consentimiento informado. Acepto voluntariamente participar en esta investigación.

Firma del participante	Fecha
Firma del testigo *(si aplica)*	Fecha
Nombre del investigador que obtiene el consentimiento informado	
Firma del investigador	Fecha