

# A Comparative Analysis of Service Learning between China and the U.S. under the Background of Promoting Ideological and Political Education in Colleges and Universities

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**Abstract:** This paper mainly introduces the service learning mode of the United States, and the main representative of China's service learning mode of voluntary service, from the purpose, form, process, effect and other aspects of comparative analysis. It also puts forward countermeasures and suggestions to clarify the educational purpose of voluntary service, cultivate the cooperative community of voluntary service, and strengthen the reflection on voluntary service.

**Keywords:** ideological and political education, service learning, voluntary service, comparative research

## 1. Service learning in the U.S.

Service learning in the United States originated in the 1960s and has formed a relatively sound model. A phrase once popular in the field of service learning can basically summarize the characteristics of service learning in the United States, "Tell me and I will forget, show me and I will remember, involve me and I will understand"[1]. Service learning is a participatory and experiential education mode that combines service and learning and realizes mutual influence and mutual benefit between service and learning through the effective linkage of students, schools, communities and the government. According to the research of Esson, Stevens-Truss and other American scholars, service learning can improve the students' cognitive goals, work skills and self-learning ability, professional learning ability, interpersonal skills and leadership qualities, self-esteem and self-efficacy, community participation and social responsibility, application ability of discipline theory, and can provide more chances for students to contact their future careers [2]. With so many positive effects, we can't help but have a question: what exactly is service learning? After analyzing the relevant data, this paper believes that service learning is a triune education method of students' learning and growth, school education, and social development needs. It effectively integrates school and social resources by organically combining volunteer service and students' learning, and promotes the growth of students.

Service learning can be divided into two types: one type is professional service learning, which combines discipline courses and volunteer services to promote professional learning; the other type is non-professional learning, that is, carrying out volunteer services to improve students' comprehensive quality, such as their cooperation and learning ability and leadership. Service learning organization, forming corresponding educational organization system, including organizer, organizing medium and process. In general, the organizer is mainly schools, the organizing medium is communities, and the organizing process mainly includes five stages of preparation, service, reflection, evaluation and celebration. Service learning evaluation, summarizing feedback is the closed loop of service learning, and quality evaluation feedback helps to increase students' enthusiasm for participation. The purpose of service learning evaluation and feedback is to sublimate students' learning by writing service learning reports; besides, students' participation enthusiasm in service learning can be mobilized in sharing and exchanging meetings, and lessons can be learnt in reflections, so that the efficacy of service learning can be enhanced. Generally speaking, the evaluation methods of service learning are the integration of self-evaluation of students, and evaluation from teachers and community volunteer organizations, by means of activity records, school credits, rewarding and incentives, etc. Promoting the sustainable benign development of service learning with high quality evaluation effect of media reports, parties, exhibition, thank-you notes, certificates, etc.

## 2. Service learning in China—take volunteer services

In order to learn the service learning in China, we take volunteer services as an example, and carried out questionnaires towards students' volunteer services in G University. Details are as follows:

College students' knowledge of volunteer activities. According to the survey results, 77.19% of college students said they knew something about university volunteer activities, and 75% of them often participated in university volunteer activities. 21.05% of college students said that they did not know much about volunteer activities but would participate in them if they had the opportunity.

Times of college students participating in volunteer activities. From the survey data, 49.12% of college students participated over 5 times, 12.28% college students participated the activities for 3-4 times, 29.82% students participated in the volunteer for 1-2 times, 8.77% of college students said they never participated any volunteer activities. It can be seen that although most students know something about volunteer activities, a large portion of college students did not participate any volunteer activities.

College students' attitudes towards volunteer activities. The survey suggests that among the surveyed students, 43.86% of them think that the majority of the volunteers' attitude in the service activities they contact is very positive and selfless. 42.11% of the students think that only a part of them are positive; 14.07% of the students had no special feelings or thought few people were positive about it.

According to the survey, half of the surveyed students participate in volunteer activities because they want to do something they can for the society or to exercise themselves and increase social experience. The other half volunteer because their university requirements or they want to expand their social network; a small number of students volunteer for fun, novelty or curiosity about volunteer work. On the whole, college students hold a positive attitudes towards participating in volunteer service, and gave the volunteer activity a positive meaning and expectation.

The biggest problem existing in volunteer services. At present, the biggest problem in volunteer services is that transparent communication mechanism is lacked between organizer and volunteers, and among volunteers. Volunteers cannot give full play to their own advantages, the poor initiative of volunteers leads to the passive state of volunteer services, and the management of volunteers scattered, arbitrary and other problems, which account for 80.7%, 57.89%, 50.88%, 40.35% respectively.

## 3. Comparative analysis of service learning between China and the U.S.

**Objectives comparison.** As an important form of American school civil education, service learning in different school has different objectives. But there are common value pursuits above these differences, that is, students should really participate in the community volunteer service and their social responsibility should be cultivated. Service learning's principle of cultivating students' civil responsibilities closely connects with communitarianism and Dewey's pragmatism. Communitarianism thinks citizen's personal interest has close link to the common interests of communities, so school education must closely connect with social life, and students should actively participate in community activities to form identity, responsibility and loyalty towards communities. Volunteer service is a kind of activity helping others and contributing to the society with their own knowledge, abilities, properties, etc., so as to promote social charity causes. With respect to college students' volunteer services, it is mainly about utilizing their extracurricular time and skills and knowledge to provide public services to others or the society without expecting anything in return. In contrast, voluntary service embodies the spirit of "dedication, friendship, mutual assistance and progress". Voluntary service can not only realize mutual help among people, but also promote the harmonious relationship among members of the society and promote common progress. The purpose of service learning and voluntary service is to promote the good of society in a certain level, while the difference is that service learning emphasizes students' subjectivity, that is, "learning" in the "service learning", while voluntary service emphasizes public welfare, that is, "service" in the "service learning".

**Forms comparison.** There are various forms of service learning activities in American colleges and universities, which can be divided into direct service learning and indirect service learning based on whether it directly meets the needs of the people being served. Direct service learning means that students can meet the needs of community or service organizations through service learning. Indirect service learning refers to some short-term activities that students engage in by assisting the community or participating in social organizations without having direct contact with the people they serve. The

types of voluntary activities in China can be divided into three categories. First, the voluntary service activities carried out by the community, such as focusing on the elderly, the disabled, people with living difficulties and other vulnerable groups; the service content covers life services, tutoring services, science and technology services, medical care, etc. The second is the voluntary activities carried out in rural areas, mainly represented by "science and technology, culture and health" activities to the countryside, China's Far West Program, youth volunteers' poverty alleviation relay program, etc. Third, volunteer services carried out in cities, such as volunteers for various large-scale events (Olympic Games, Paralympic Games, Huawei Developer Conference, etc.), large-scale exhibitions, environmental protection or medical, and volunteer activities of certain venues and institutions. In terms of the forms of service learning and voluntary service, they have differences and similarities. They both involve environmental protection, medical treatment, culture and other aspects, and are basically carried out in the form of projects. The difference is that the service learning programs in the United States are basically established in cooperation with community organizations and implemented by communities. However, the organizer of voluntary service in China is uncertain. It can be a university, a company or some department or unit, and most of the voluntary service is a one-time short activity to complete some task, so the students' growth and sense of acquisition are relatively weak.

**Process comparison.** As mentioned above, the implementation process of service learning in American colleges and universities is divided into five links: preparation, service, reflection, evaluation and celebration, forming a good closed-loop. The five links are interlinked and promote each other. Service learning and voluntary service in the organizational process have similarities, but also presents differences. One is the theme selection stage, the core of service learning is about students' learning, students are required to prepare the corresponding theory knowledge in advance, and community's qualification is inspected, and only those who accords with the teaching goal and can be signed with a cooperation agreement, service learning projects are carried out, while voluntary service starts from the perspective of social needs, and students are passive participators, so it is not professional for students and does not meet students' needs. Second, in the implementation stage of the activity, service learning is a two-way interaction and reciprocal process. Students use what they have learned to meet the needs of the community, while consolidating their own knowledge and learning from practice. Yet, the voluntary service carried out by Chinese universities is basically one-way, and in order to meet the needs of local people or units, students are more likely to play the role of "servicers". Third, the lack of reflection and celebration of voluntary service in China. Although we also carry out reflection through personal summary, report submission, discussion and other forms, such reflection and summary are scattered and not systematic. In many cases, students are passively involved and arranged, so the whole voluntary service process is relatively lack of autonomy and reflection. At the same time, service learning in American colleges and universities also displays the results of service learning in various ways, giving corresponding rewards and celebrations to outstanding individuals and teachers, etc. However, our voluntary service activities are generally carried out in the form of single commendation, and evaluation and celebration are relatively insufficient.

**Effects comparison.** As an important educational method, service learning in American colleges and universities plays an important role in students, teachers, schools and communities. The influence of voluntary service in universities in our country mainly reflects three aspects. First, it has a positive impact on students, which is conducive to enhancing the ideological and moral quality of college students, cultivating students' teamwork consciousness and cooperation ability, and also has a positive effect on students' professional learning. Second, it has a positive impact on college education and completes the mission of serving the society to a certain extent. Third, it has a positive impact on servicing local or workplace, such as the "three to the countryside (culture, science and technology, and health to the countryside" activity, which plays a certain role in promoting the development of local science and technology, culture, health, education and other aspects. In summary, the education and teaching objectives of service learning are clear, especially the students' harvest in the activities; voluntary service is more in the way of centralized team, and the degree of integration with curriculum learning is not high. In addition, service learning in the United States would conduct sufficient research and design service learning activity plans before carrying out projects, so that the connection between colleges and communities will be closer, whereas Chinese college students volunteer service research is not sufficient, the development of activities is relatively limited, and the effect and function also have certain limitations.

#### 4. The enlightenment of service learning on strengthening and improving volunteer service in colleges and universities in China

**The educational purpose of volunteer services should be clarified.** The goal of higher education is not to impart much knowledge, but to let students wake up from the rigid inherent ideology, enable them to flexibly deal with complicated practical problems, cope with the changing world, develop independent rational thinking and ability, realize the construction of their own consciousness, and consciously control their own destiny. In short, the focus of college education is not to let students be doers, nor to let students become knowers, but to let them grow into builders of knowledge and practice. The development of voluntary service in colleges and universities should give full play to the subjectivity of students, strengthen the consciousness of democratic participation in college students' voluntary service, respect differences and attach importance to equality, and fully respect the free expression rights of college volunteers. Volunteer service is a kind of voluntary and unpaid activity that pays time and energy for social harmony and promoting social progress. Only by fully ensuring the purity of college students' participation in voluntary services, encouraging students to adhere to critical thinking and rational choice, and respecting their right to free expression, can we further guide them to establish a correct outlook on life, values and the world.

**A cooperative community of volunteer services should be fostered.** The development of voluntary services cannot be separated from mutual cooperation. It is necessary to strengthen the cultivation of a cooperative community of voluntary services, strengthen cooperation and exchanges among college students' volunteers, establish close partnerships, communicate with each other and consult with each other, and work together to achieve service goals. The needs of the service objects should be fully understood. Basic information of the service areas or objects, economy, culture, life, major problems faced, etc. need to be consulted with the help of the Internet. The real needs of the service objects need to be understood, emotional exchanges should be strengthened, and valuable support and help should be provided. Through continuous support and help, volunteers and service objects would establish a mutually supportive relationship and gradually establish a community of volunteer services.

**The reflection on voluntary service should be strengthened.** Based on the summary, reflection and improvement, we should pay attention to guiding college students to adhere to self reflection in the process of volunteer service. Good ideological and moral cultivation can effectively conflict the interests of different groups and promote the overall good of society. Self reflection and sublimation is needed from the perspective of social needs, the relationship between the service provider and the served, practice and self-criticism. At the same time, it is necessary to emphasize the reflection on voluntary service activities; from the planning, organization, implementation to the end of the activities, students should summarize and reflect on their own work experience and experience by recording, discuss and communicate in a timely manner when encountering problems, and periodically summarize experiences and lessons. Dewey said that "serious, repeated and continuous reflection on a problem" [3] is the best way of thinking. College volunteers carry out investigation, research and reflection on volunteer service work, and would finally find that they have a deeper understanding of the work they have completed.

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