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The Education University
of Hong Kong

**Capstone Project - Strengthening community
integration between Queen's Hill students and Lung
Yeuk Tau community via Place-based Learning.**

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A Project submitted to the Education University of Hong Kong
for the degree of Bachelor Sociology and Community Studies

Date: April, 2024

Declaration

This is the Capstone Project submitted to the Education University of Hong Kong for the degree of Bachelor of Social Sciences (Honours) in Sociology and Community Studies. This work has not been submitted previously for examination to any tertiary institution.

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1. The scope and objectives of the project

The capstone project is a place-based experiential learning package organized for primary students in Queen's Hill. Queen's Hill, located in Fanling, is a newly developed community whereas public estates were established in recent years. Hence, the residents, including the primary students are all newcomers of Queen's Hill, who are unfamiliar with the community. Since the primary students lack bonds with the community, they can barely integrate with the community. To connect them with the community, me and my project teammates decided to familiarize themselves with the nearby community --- Lung Yeuk Tau community. The Lung Yeuk Tau Heritage Trail there was selected as the field for place-based learning because it encompasses abundant historical values, serving as a great community resource for educating students about the community history and culture.

The participants of this learning package are 20 junior primary students from the Salvation Army Centaline Charity Fund Queen's Hill School. There are bountiful activities in the learning package, including field trip, community history lessons artwork-making lessons, tour-guide training sessions and a showcase exhibition. The four key objectives of the project: deepening their understanding of the community history, expanding their knowledge of Chinese culture, strengthening their sense of belonging to the community and integrating the Queen's Hill community and the Lung Yeuk Tau community.

2. A review and evaluation of the initiative(s) taken to fulfil the proposed objectives

We used multi-initiatives to fulfill the proposed four objectives, including experiential game stalls, artwork-making, field trip, tour guide training and showcase exhibitions. Some of the approaches are effective, while some of them have room for improvement. A holistic evaluation will be explained as follows:

2.1 Achievements

Firstly, we effectively increased primary students' understanding of the community history. The field trip to the Lung Yeuk Tau Heritage Trail was one of the means. The on-site visit aimed to make the historical knowledge construction more impactful and

memorable. It succeeded. For instance, we taught the students that the narrow door of Lo Wai was used to prevent enemies from getting in the village. An interviewee said she was impressed by how small the door was during the field trip. She did not know it was that narrow until she observed it in-person. Another interview mentioned that among all activities, on-site visit was the most helpful in understanding the Lung Yeuk Tau community because he could observe whether it has been changed. These two students proved how powerful the field trip was in broadening their understanding of community history.

The goal “expanding primary students’ knowledge of Chinese culture” was also well-achieved. Firstly, we led an outdoor classroom in Lung Yeuk Tau to let students observe and appreciate the cultural relics closely. One interviewee mentioned that her favorite building was Tin Hau Temple. She even recalled the names of the statues [Qian Li Yan and Shen Feng Er] inside. This knowledge was taught during the field trip, proving that the on-site investigation strengthened her memory on what she learned. Additionally, we leveraged artwork-making to educate students about the architectural features in Lung Yeuk Tau and traditional cuisine in walled village. It was effective. The interviewee could identify the corresponding architectural styles and culture of the artwork. For instance, paper cutting represented the mural of Tin Hau Temple, while clay was used to demonstrate the traditional dim sum of walled village. It reflected how impactful the craft-creating experiences were on their expansion of knowledge of Chinese culture.

2.2 Failures

We failed to strengthen students’ sense of belonging (Sob) to the community. SoB to the community involves two dimensions. The first one is their Sob to the physical community, meaning that they will identify themselves as a part of Queen’s Hill. Another dimension is their emotional attachment to people in the community. We failed to achieve both.

Regarding the failure in boosting Sob to the physical community, one of the possible reasons is the over-emphasis on knowledge delivery. We wanted them to absorb as much historical knowledge as they can. However, knowledge, especially the historical one, is barely associated with primary students’ life. If we wish to raise their attachment to the community, it is essential to link their life with Lung Yeuk Tau. It is suggested to provide them opportunities to contribute to the community, such as

giving them responsibilities in community initiatives. More concrete examples will be explained in part 3.2.

Apart from the sense of belonging to the physical community, we also aimed to enhance their attachment to the people in the community. The students were supposed to develop camaraderie with the community members (i.e., other participated students) after working in teams for 12 lessons, but most of them did not build friendship after the project. Although they were divided into 3 teams (i.e., tour guide team, artwork docent team, game stall runner team) to work on the exhibition, the nature of the work is individual based. They just needed to recite their won assigned script, no cooperation was involved. They could not build bonds with each other because it lacked memorable collective experiences. More suggestions will be explained in part 3.2.

We also failed to integrate the Queen's Hill community and the Lung Yeuk Tau community. We proposed that there would be frequent interactions between Lung Yeuk Tau's residents and the primary students in Queen's Hill. For instance, inviting the residents to visit the showcase exhibition. However, we focused on delivering knowledge and organizing the exhibition that we paid little attention on their interactions. Solely having the primary students of Queen's Hill to be the promoters of the Lung Yuek Tau in the showcase exhibition could not connect the two communities. To better achieve this goal, we may consider having the students to introduce their artwork in the trail for the residents or inviting some grannies in the trail as the cooks of walled village dim sum or as the instructors of traditional Chinese arts.

3. An explanation of the ways in which the study can demonstrate the integration of sociological knowledge, community development, and stakeholder engagement

3.1 Sociological imagination

The sociological imagination can be divided into two dimensions: (private) troubles and (public) issues (Andersen et al., 2001). The former one refers to privately felt problems that are driven from events or feelings in one's life. The latter one influence many people, and they are originated from the institutional settings and history of a society. That means the origin of the "problem" determines whether it is a trouble or an issue.

Since the primary students in Queen's Hill had low sense of the belonging to the community, we firstly looked for the reasons contributing to it. One of our groupmates said: "Because children nowadays were indifferent towards the community surroundings. They always stick with the mobile." This statement indicates that primary students' low SoB is caused by personal problems, meaning that primary students nowadays lack traits of concerning about the community. However, literature proved that children having low SoB may be resulted from the institutional arrangement. One's attachment to the community is determined by his self-perceived influences on a community (Breunig et al., 2010). If one thinks he is influential to the community, he will tend to have greater SoB to the community, vice versa. Children are powerless in the institutional setting that he can barely influence the community (Sayer et al., 2013), so they may have low SoB to the community. Hence, their low SoB should be regarded as a public issue rather than a private trouble.

To enhance their SoB to the community, we attempted to empower them by emphasizing how important they were for the community integration. For instance, we displayed their products in the exhibition, had them to lead a virtual field trip and to run game stalls themselves. Apart from artwork creator, tour guide and game host, we even created a special role for them: Lung Yeuk Tau Community Promoter. We kept reminding their importance, attempting to make them feel that their involvement was valued. However, this act of empowerment was too shallow for them to treat themselves as an influencer of the community. In this case, we may consider involving them in activities with higher level of decision-making, which will be explained in part 3.2.

3.2 Stakeholder Engagement

Primary student is the main stakeholder of the event so here is a reflection on how to increase their engagement, by using the conceptual framework of Ladder of Children's Participation raised by Roger Hart.

The framework primarily serves as a reference for educators to evaluate young's people participation. There are 8 ladders in total. From the lowest participation to the highest participation: they are Manipulation, Decoration, Tokenism, Assigned but informed, Consulted and informed, c, Child-initiated and directed, and Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults (Hart, 2008).

As mentioned in last section, we did not truly empower the primary students by displaying their products and having them as tour guide, artwork docent and game host. It is because this so-called “empowerment” belongs to the fourth ladder, Assigned but informed. It occurs when the children understand the project’ intensions, volunteer for the project and have a meaningful role (Hart, 2008). At the very beginning of the project, we designed a poster to promote this project at the primary school. Some of the participated students said they loved Chinese history, so they enrolled in the project. They were assigned the role of “Lung Yeuk Tau Community Promoter”. However, they are not involved in all the key decision-making processes such as the selection the filed site and the design of the game stalls, the display of the showcase exhibition, etc.

To increase the students’ participation, we may consider dividing them into 5 groups. Each of us will be the mentor of one group. Each group is responsible for designing and decorating a medium-sized display for the exhibition. We will assign each group a theme. Despite it is an adult-initiated activity, we will share the decision-making role with children. They can freely decide what to use, where to place, how to make, etc. We will only provide technical guidance to them. According to Hart (2008), this approach can be regarded as the sixth ladder, adult-initiated, shared decisions with children. Not only can this strategy raise primary students’ engagement and their sense of ownership for the project, but also help them build friendship through teamwork.

As mentioned, one of the unachieved project’s objectives is strengthening students’ sense of belonging to the people in the community. Our adopted approach to engage students was investigating Lung Yeuk Tau through teamwork. The subject is the field site. The modified one is “Building up teamwork through the investigation of Lung Yeuk Tau, highlighting teamwork as the subject. It facilitates for them to build friendships with their teammates, fostering their bonding with each other.

3.3 Community Development

Social cohesion, one of the most discussed topics in today’s community development, will be enhanced if every individual feels that their identity and contribution are recognized and valued (Johnson, 1997). However, as mentioned, some of the groups in community are devalued under the institutional system, such as children. As a result, the primary students are isolated and cannot truly integrate to the community, hampering the development of their sense of belonging (SoB) to the community.

To enhance their SoB to the community, schools should be committed to preparing young people to assume active roles as participants in community processes, asserting that children are as much citizens as adults (Smith, 2002, p. 591). Such empowerment can be achieved through place-based education, referring to pedagogies leveraging the domestic environment as the context for teaching and learning (Smith, 2002).

We adopted place-based learning in the project, leveraging the place (i.e., Lung Yeuk tai Heritage Trail) to educate primary students the community history and Chinese culture. However, this form of place-based learning did not increase the primary students SoB to the community, because it failed to induct the primary students into community membership (Smith, 2002).

To overcome this obstacle, we should allow them to perform crucial tasks or share their insights on community issues (Smith, 2002). If we organize this place-based learning again, we will shift the theme from community history to community facility. History is the about the past, so it is difficult to ground learning in students' lived experience. However, facility is about the present, whereas having closer connection with primary students. Firstly, having them to visit the Queen's Hill community and investigate the deficiency in community facility. We need to select senior primary students because they have prerequisite knowledge on a sound community. Then, allowing them to share their perspectives through a report or a presentation to district officials for reference. There are some successful local examples. For instance, Drainage Services Department sought primary students' advice on the facilities of Cha Kwo Ling Promenade (Chu, 2023). The students submitted their self-designed model of amusement facilities to the construction team. They found it feasible, so they further improved the design based on the students' ideas. Finally, a children-designed facility was constructed. This experience will make the children think that they are valued, contributing them to induct as a community member. Thus, it is suggested to replace the project's theme with community facility.

This modified activity has two advantages. Firstly, it empowers them as much citizens as adults, making them feel that they are valued. It contributes to the development of their' SoB to the community. Secondly, it fully unleashes the ultimate goal of place-based learning: providing a context for students to apply what they learnt at school in daily life (Smith, 2002).

4. Lessons for community development and social cohesion

Regarding community development, this project can be served as a reference for other schools or community institutions that also wish to boost primary students' sense of belonging to the community (SoB) via place-based education. However, as mentioned, place-based learning does not necessarily raise students' SoB to the community. The most indispensable principle is involving children to perform important role regarding community issues. It is difficult to achieve this goal if schools work alone, without the engagement of external parties. Hence, it is vital to involve community partners such as district officials, non-governmental organizations, charities, etc. These intuitions always work on different projects and seek public's opinions. It can be exemplified by the cooperation between children and Drainage Services Department on the Cha Kwo Ling Promenade mentioned above. The school-community collaboration can provide students a more comprehensive context for them to develop their attachment to the community. Additionally, the cooperation between primary students and community institutions equips students with necessary entails as a citizen (e.g., caring the community). Hence, school-community collaboration contributing to the future community development.

In terms of social cohesion, it will be strengthened if each individual's identity and contribution are recognized and valued (Johnson, 1997). Since children's opinions are less valued in society, it is common for them to have no attachment to the community. If we engage them more in community issues, such as listening and accept their opinions, or even involving them in certain level of decision-making, they will think that their identity as children is valued. Once they think they matter, they will tend to develop attachment to the community. This is the same case for the vulnerable groups such as women and ethnic minority. When social cohesion is discussed, these vulnerable groups will also be involved. This is because they are sometimes marginalized. Hence, if schools or community institutions wish to promote social cohesion, it is essential to empower the powerless groups, such as children, women and ethnic minorities.

(2451 words)

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