An Examination of Service-Learning in Christian High Schools

Service-learning is an educational practice that uses community service to help students learn academic content (Billig, 2011). Research has demonstrated the ability of service-learning to produce student outcomes specific to cognitive and academic development as well as interpersonal and personal development. However, the research is mostly limited to public higher education and K-12 public schools. Nominal efforts have been made to research service-learning in Christian higher education. However, there is still an obvious need for research that documents the practice of service-learning in Christian high schools. This qualitative descriptive study examined service-learning in Christian high schools to discover how it aligns with the professionally accepted definitions and standards of quality service-learning as revealed in the literature. Findings from five semistructured interviews with participants from Christian high schools revealed that, as a whole, service-learning in the Christian high school context more closely resembles the practice of community service. Service-learning practice in Christian high schools aligns with the quality standards for diversity and meaningful service, but Christian high schools are not meeting the quality service-learning standards for partnerships, youth voice, duration and intensity, link to curriculum, reflection, and progress monitoring. Findings also revealed the following factors of service-learning in Christian schools that distinguish it from service-learning in public schools: service that addresses the self-centered mind, biblically mandated service, love and respect for diverse people as image-bearers of God, lifelong service, the connection of service to the person and work of Jesus Christ, and the role of the person and work of the Holy Spirit in Christian service.