

The Process of Engagement: Developing Civic Literacy via School–University Partnerships

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this article is to review a partnership between a teacher education department and a dropout prevention program. The partnership developed from a variety of communities' needs, no less of which was that of reconnecting marginalized youth at a local dropout prevention school with their community through cultural and civic exploration. At the heart of the relationship was the building of powerful curricular experiences for these students through the support of preservice teachers who mentored the at-risk youth. The CREATE project (**C**ultural **R**eflection About **E**vansville—**A**rt **T**ransforms and **E**ngages) was an interdisciplinary experience that supported the development of a strong service-learning environment. Developing civic literacy with participants was a tricky business as faculty, students, and community partners explored ways of revitalizing a downtown area. Some challenges were anticipated; others were unique to the project. However, a few concerns have greater implications for higher education professionals and community partners as they develop a service-learning curriculum.

The purpose of this article is to review a civic literacy service-learning project between an alternative high school for dropout prevention and a comprehensive university's teacher education department. Although the relationship began simply as a placement for preservice teachers, both the school's principal and the university's professor recognized that more could come from the relationship. This article provides information for other institutions of higher education regarding how a field-based placement can be transformed into an opportunity for preservice teachers and marginalized youth to explore their community through cultural and civic exploration. The CREATE project (**C**ultural **R**eflection About **E**vansville—**A**rt **T**ransforms and **E**ngages) was an

interdisciplinary experience that linked university faculty, K–12 teachers, and students from Grades K–16. Throughout the course of this partnership, a number of processes were critical in supporting the development of a strong service-learning environment.

The current engagement project under review was begun as a placement for preservice teachers. As a university professor and a principal of a local dropout prevention high school (Stanley Hall Enrichment Center), we met to discuss the possibilities because we both recognized that preservice teachers in an elementary education program had limited experience with, or understanding of the need for, remediation for all students. Slavkin initially wanted candidates to interview students

at Stanley Hall to clarify how students who were marginalized in their elementary schools would be at risk for dropping out and feeling disconnected from their schools and communities by the time they reached high school. Sensing that her students might benefit from mentoring by college students, Faust suggested that the project be extended. The goal for the partnership was to provide preservice teachers with a chance to explore what students need to be successful in school. Although they would interview Stanley Hall students at the beginning of the semester-long placement, preservice teachers would use the knowledge of high school students to develop service-learning projects that met their curricular needs.

Preservice teachers were enrolled in an elementary educational assessment course. Working with Stanley Hall would provide university students with a chance to examine curriculum, investigate students' individual progress needs toward graduation credits, and investigate the pressures that students felt in previous school placements (and how these future teachers might avoid allowing students to "fall through the cracks"). High school students would be provided with individualized mentoring throughout an academic term, helping them to be provided with individual assistance, clarification of academic roles and responsibilities, assistance with meeting credit-based assignments, and support in developing an academically based service-learning project. Beyond the goals initially developed with this project, Faust and Slavkin recognized the emotive potential of having young teachers interact with struggling students, thereby allowing a strong mentoring relationship to develop. The narrative that follows relates how this partnership evolved to facilitate three areas essential for authentic curriculum.

Essential Areas for Authentic Assessment

As mentioned, authentic curriculum calls for three essential criteria. First, all preservice teachers and at-risk students understand how curriculum should be designed to meet com-

munity needs. Second, the partnership maintains a goal that all students feel engaged with that curriculum. Finally, the project ensures that the curriculum help students feel stronger ties to the community.

Area 1: Curriculum Should Meet Community Needs

The goal of this university-school-community partnership was to have all community members (not just students) reflect about the cultural and social heritage of our community. Otten (2000) stated that *service-learning curriculum* is an umbrella term used to describe many aspects of teaching and learning for personal development. Schools have used service learning as a curricular support that increases students' involvement with local communities and improves the philanthropic experience of youth (Meyers, 1999; Nix, 2001; Schumer & Belbas, 1996). Service-learning curriculum can assist students in seeing the real-world implications of curriculum.

Service-learning projects must provide students opportunities for active involvement in the democratic processes of the school and community (Rutter & Newmann, 1989; Schukar, 1997). Many researchers have identified the importance of students' moving from the theory of the classroom curriculum to reality via involvement with their communities (Halsted & Schine, 1994; Lee, 1997; Meyers, 1999; Newmann & Rutter, 1985–1986). We believed that Stanley Hall students could have their curricular needs met by doing a project that would help them to reconnect with their schools and communities in which they had felt marginalized earlier in their academic careers. Unlike the prior incarnations of character education (i.e., curriculum that supports the moral and social growth of students), the engagement in the current project was designed "to equally benefit the provider and the recipient of the service as well as to ensure equal focus on both the service being provided and the learning that is occurring" (Furco, 1994, p. 396). Whereas community service provides students with the opportunity to give back to their communities, service-learning

programs emphasize the connection among the service, the curriculum, and students' reflecting on their experiences as they relate to the curriculum (O'Flanagan, 1997).

The preservice teachers in this program were originally the only participants to engage in a service-learning experience (i.e., mentoring the Stanley Hall students), but it became quickly apparent that these at-risk students should also participate in service-learning experiences; that is, during their initial interviews, Stanley Hall students reported feeling disconnected from schools and feeling largely ignored by their communities. For example, one preservice teacher, Hannah, shared that her mentee, Mary, did not see a reason why she should graduate:

Mary is overwhelmed by school. She doesn't lack the skills to succeed; however, she fails to see why she should try to succeed. No one in her family graduated high school. Her mother and father both collect unemployment, and her older siblings find work at a local refinery. Why should she work hard when her family shows that they can survive without high school diplomas? I need to help her to understand that her education is important for more than just employment. She needs to see that she can make a difference in her community and be more than the other members of her family. (personal reflection related to initial interview with Stanley Hall student, 2006)

The university students quickly decided that they would help these at-risk high school students by helping them determine how they might meet academic credits through a service-learning project that would link them with the community and show them how their classwork linked with community expectations and needs such that the students could see a rationale for their educations.

Area 2: Curriculum Should Engage Students

Certain effects have been observed in students who participate in service-learning activities.

Students find an improved connection with their community and a feeling of ownership of both their community and their school curriculum (Nix, 2001; Sandler & Vangrft, 1995; Schine, 1997). Newmann and Rutter (1983) showed that secondary students' involvement in service-learning projects modestly increases their sense of social responsibility and personal competence. Green (1989) and Butcher and Hall (1998) found that service-learning involvement with elementary and secondary at-risk students may provide them with the interventions necessary to succeed in school. In clarifying how curriculum should be authentic for students, preservice teachers identified that the project might instill in the high school students a sense of why their coursework is relevant and necessary.

Similar assets have been evidenced for students engaged in service learning as components of higher education coursework. Allen (2003) asserted that engaging students in curricula supported by community partnerships develops in them a deeper understanding of the role of learning in community growth. Preservice teachers in an educational assessment class gain increased knowledge of the need for differentiated and authentic curriculum from students who have not had such experiences as elementary students. By listening to the stories of these youth, preservice teachers improve in their skills at ensuring that the curriculum they create meets the needs of all students (not just those who learn in spite of what teachers did).

As an authentic pedagogical practice, service learning provides teachers and students in higher education the opportunity to learn about civic responsibilities while supporting the needs of the community through active dialogue with community partners. The academic curriculum is enhanced by demonstrating the real-world implications of the information reviewed and the action involved in learning (Allen, 2003). At-risk students must reconnect with schools if they are to meet academic requirements for graduation. It became clear to preservice teachers during their mentoring relationship that they needed to help students clarify the supportive relationship of

their school if they were to remain involved and be successful. Mary Deutsch, the language arts teacher at the school, shared,

These students have been failed by their communities and their schools and their families. They need someone who can sit with them over periods of time and share their stories. Stanley Hall students need so much attention, more than we as teachers can give. If they can see that their success matters to someone besides their teachers and themselves, it can make a world of difference in helping them to succeed. (Stanley Hall language arts teacher, personal communication, 2005)

Meeting students' academic needs was successful only if students saw that their dedication to the project was important to their mentors and teachers. Mentors helped the high school students by collectively (1) developing a service-learning contract, (2) linking project ideas with academic standards from the high school students' courses, (3) helping the students interact with community partners engaged with the project, (4) helping students write weekly reflections of the work performed, and (5) preparing a presentation and portfolio that represented the students' knowledge and skills gained over the course of the semester.

Area 3: Curriculum Should Help Students Feel Connected to Community

Finally, curriculum should help youth understand how they are members of the community. Faust shared that a key component of the Stanley Hall Enrichment Center was to design curriculum to help end the brain drain that Evansville faced in the 1980s, by awakening young residents to their place in local greatness, by binding them to the heart of the city (downtown), and by attracting others to relocate here. In other words, the project—and subsequent public art projects to come from it—fulfills the master plan's call for "place-making" efforts downtown.

The more students identify the connections between communities and curriculums,

the more likely they are to assimilate this information and see the relevance of learning. Stanley Hall, in Evansville, Indiana, has a history of dedication to the needs of students who have not fit into the classrooms of traditional high schools. Stanley Hall has met academic standards by providing an individualized curriculum that meets graduate standards. However, Faust asserted that within the last decade, the school created a curriculum largely based on service learning. As such, its goals parallel those largely found throughout the service-learning literature discussed earlier.

Faculty at Stanley Hall believe that all students can learn; that all students deserve a safe environment conducive to learning, as well as equal access to curricula that enhance opportunities to maximize personal growth; and that all students can contribute to the society of which they are a part. The teachers of this school provide a safe environment conducive to learning, with opportunities for success, growth, and wise use of time, talents, tools, and other resources but which challenge all students to contribute to society, further their educations, and empower themselves (all the while still embracing the propositions set forth by the Indiana Department of Education and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards).

Stanley Hall

At Stanley Hall, the current status of educational programming is evidenced via measures taken on-site that relate to the mission and the school's three primary goals. Stanley Hall's performance and accountability is measured by indicators selected by its community committee, which are inextricably tied to its mission as an alternative school.

As Stanley Hall has increased its use of service-learning components to provide coursework and meet Indiana State standards, it has taken steps to analyze the efficacy of this programming in meeting its three primary goals. Specifically, following service-learning performances, students demonstrate improved sense of self-efficacy, increased connection

with community, and enhanced involvement with the school curriculum (Nix & Slavkin, 2002).

Achievement expectations are geared toward fulfillment of the Stanley Hall mission to empower students to earn a high school diploma, advance to postsecondary education or gainful employment, remain lifelong learners, and serve as worthy community members. Preservice teachers begin to clarify how the curriculum that they teach and how they engage students in elementary school has implications for what students do later in school. Josh, a university mentor working with Dre, a high school senior, shared,

Nobody ever seemed to give a damn for this kid. Dre is so grateful for any attention he gets. He has the potential to do so much, but he fails to make much headway because for years everything has been against him. His teachers ignored him. His family neglected or abused him. His community forgot him. You begin to see how important it is for an elementary teacher to create a classroom that meets their needs and shows them that they are valued. (personal reflection related to initial interview with Stanley Hall student, 2006)

As such, proficiency and mastery of state standards are guided by these achievement goals, all of which are tied to service learning. Students who engage in service-learning activities participate within the school curriculum while providing a service to their community. This community and curricular integration has increased student participation within schools, thereby creating a sense of ownership and active participation. Moreover, it has helped the school maintain a level of success not achieved with these students in a traditional high school setting.

Example of Engagement: Uniting History and Public Transportation

The current project, CREATE, began as two independent initiatives that became an inte-

grated, holistic project. After the 1st year of preservice teacher placement, several issues became clear: First, Stanley Hall students needed near-constant assistance with staying focused and motivated on curricular expectations and the rationale for graduating. Second, preservice teachers were ill equipped to understand how students could be so unmotivated and dependent. Furthermore, they quickly saw how difficult it would be to work with students who felt disengaged from the world of schools and felt as though teachers had ignored, avoided, and purposefully sabotaged their educations.

The school began to modify service activities in 2003–2004, transforming initiatives into service learning. Teachers attempted to mentor individual students through service-learning experiences: five teachers supporting 95 projects, each with individual community partners. To make matters more difficult, all students at Stanley Hall complete three courses at a time, and each student has a unique schedule. Teachers were working with 95 projects with 95 community partners for 42 different courses offered by the school. Teachers nearly finished service learning as they started it.

Step 1: Reconsidering Service Learning

After a difficult 1st-year experience, faculty met to analyze information taken from focus groups consisting of the community partners and Stanley Hall students. What was clear from these data was that projects should be authentic, but authenticity did not necessarily mean individually based. Furthermore, faculty realized that some curricula were better met through projects (not knowledge-based standards but process-based standards that emphasized skills). As such, university preservice teachers were brought in to support projects that were authentic but might be reorganized into small groups. In addition, Stanley Hall teachers would work with one or two projects with small groups of students, whereas preservice teachers would work individually with high school students.

Step 2: Preservice Teachers Supporting At-Risk Students via Service Learning

University and high school faculty needed to prepare all participants for the work ahead. Creating a service-learning-based curriculum was a difficult task because all students needed to understand how partnering with community might meet their curricular needs. If students did not feel as though they were part of the school community (or part of their neighborhood community), then they needed to see how they might be a resource for the school and town. As part of their outreach efforts, the school's faculty met with area industry, not-for-profits, and other key community leaders to perform a needs assessment of the greater Evansville area.

Step 3: Inviting Involvement From Community Partners

One factor identified during those meetings was the need for downtown revitalization that also supported local art initiatives. As the school considered ways to develop its curriculum, finding a partner who could work with the school would serve the school's needs as well as those of the community. During those discussions a faculty member from the university (Hillary Braysmith, art department) identified a local artist who sought to create a public art project that supported the juvenile courts by giving local delinquents a chance for reform.

Although the high school students were far from being delinquents, they had similar academic and social needs—they needed to feel valued by others, and they needed interventions that showed that the community wanted them to succeed. This second initiative was an already-existing project in our community that organized public artworks representing the history of our area. These two projects—the public art project and the Stanley Hall curriculum—not only supported each other's needs but worked to realize a greater purpose: helping young and old alike in our community recognize the valuable cultural history that the city of Evansville had

previously hidden away. The efficacy of such a program needed confirmation and, thus, verification from school faculty—would such a program be effective?

Our students need to feel appreciated and know that they matter. Service learning clearly was the answer, so that students could see that their actions were valued by community members. Art was something that so many of them were good at, something that they felt they could be successful with. We didn't have funding for an art teacher, but knew we had to do something curricularly that would let students show their strength. Linking their work with [the university's] art department could ensure them some success while also meeting academic coursework. (Mary Deutsch, language arts teacher at Stanley Hall, personal communication, 2006)

Step 4: Linking Curriculum With Authentic Community Needs

This project incorporated needs assessments derived from the City of Evansville's master plan, the Conventions and Visitors Bureau's promotion of cultural tourism, and the Capital Development Fund's guidelines for economic and cultural development of downtown Evansville. The City of Evansville's master plan called for gateways and public artworks as a part of downtown economic revitalization. The project was designed to develop the cultural heritage and assets of the area through engagement of at-risk youth and university mentor partners. Given that other cities have utilized at-risk and marginalized youth throughout the last 30 years (see Baca's [2009] work with at-risk youth in Los Angeles), this project addressed two areas of our community that have been neglected: First, the cultural and social infrastructures of our downtown area desperately needed renewal. Second, the causes of at-risk status in the teens who attended the secondary school involved in the partnership were threefold: feeling alienated from their communities, demonstrating poor academic skills, and facing challenges with peer involvement.

Step 5: Designing Curriculum to Meet Community Needs

The project was designed to support the development of three public art projects taking the form of bus shelters. Each shelter represented an aspect of the transportation history of Evansville. The youth who were engaged in this project reinvested in their community through group-based enterprises that challenged them to recognize that academics are a means for cultural and social expression and community improvement. The curriculum was organized to meet academic standards and support the needs of the community at large. Individual self-awareness, self-expression, and self-validation can result from the collaborative solving of community problems. Using service learning with this population was supported by the work of Nix and Slavkin (2002), who found that marginalized high school youth can increase their self-efficacy, engagement with community, and engagement with schools through service-based initiatives.

Step 6: Creating Curricular Contracts

Because this project afforded at-risk youth at the Stanley Hall Enrichment Center the chance to work in concert with mentors from the university in their area and with adults from the community, it fostered the development of prosocial skills, conflict resolution skills, the ability to choose peers wisely, and the ability to make good life choices. The mission of this project stemmed from area service-learning experts' joining with community leaders to enhance Evansville's civic pride by expanding the citizens' knowledge of its cultural heritage and community history. University mentors worked with high school mentees to clarify the service-learning contracts. Contracts were organized around students' academic coursework and with community partners' expectations for the project. Four primary objectives were identified for the project, as gathered across all individual contracts, with a culminating outcome of three public artworks:

Objective 1: Students will research the history of the Evansville transportation, noting the aesthetics and cultural heritage of the area and its impact on the city of Evansville.

Objective 2: Students will represent the history, community, and civic life of the Evansville area into schematics used to create three transportation-based bus shelters.

Objective 3: Students will research the history of the Washington Avenue corridor, noting the aesthetics and cultural heritage of the area and its impact on the city of Evansville.

Objective 4: Students will represent the history, community, and civic life of the city of Evansville in models for three bus shelter / public art monuments. When grant funds are received, these structures will be built on the Washington Avenue corridor.

Step 7: Facilitating the Project

University mentors and Stanley Hall students worked over the course of a semester to develop bus shelters based on the transportation history of the city. Students and staff at Stanley Hall, an alternative education high school in Vanderburgh County with an approximate enrollment of 100 at-risk students, performed a needs assessment of community concerns during the summer and fall of 2003. Central to the results of the assessment and in support of Evansville's master plan was the need for city gateways and public artworks that not only supported urban renewal but also demonstrated the cultural heritage of the city. Project CREATE identified locations and created these city gateways and public artworks.

Project CREATE worked with a method designed by Baca (an internationally acclaimed artist affiliated with the University of California–Los Angeles) and facilitated by Braysmith. Just as the cultural heritage of the city of Evansville is a hidden strength of the area, so too are the youth involved at the Stanley Hall Enrichment Center.

Furthermore, the project supported the development of the downtown area, which nurtured students' knowledge of the community's civic and cultural history, and the development of service initiatives that were self-sustaining and could continue following the current granting cycle.

Beginning in the fall of 2004, Braysmith launched the CREATE bus shelters program, mentoring staff at the university, the City of Evansville, and the Stanley Hall Enrichment Center through the process of running a collaborative intervention. Braysmith and 14 bus shelter apprentices (Stanley Hall students) created bus shelters as part of the city's holistic downtown revitalization plan. The city hired the apprentices to define its public and aesthetic identity, and it entrusted them with furthering the economic, social, and cultural well-being of all citizens. The apprentices earned a stipend, a diploma (upon completion of the program), and the public accolades of significant adults (e.g., the mayor, school leadership), as well as positive media and peer recognition.

Because the bus shelters commemorated the diverse history of the community, the apprentices researched an inclusive history—using libraries, the museum, and historic sites and interviewing community elders—and coordinated their discoveries. University faculty and students mentored the youths and helped them apply computer and additional academic skills (e.g., math and science) to their endeavor. High school students worked on high school credits because the bus shelters project was aligned with each student's academic coursework for partial credit.

Step 8: Reflecting on the Impact of the Project

To see the potential of these projects and their impact on student learning and civic engagement, it is critical to view the project through the lens of the five characteristic requirements of any good service-learning program: problem solving and conflict resolution; student reflection of process; expertise; social, citizen, and

leadership skills; and reflectivity. For a project to truly be considered service learning, all five components must be supported.

Evaluation

If a project such as this one is to truly demonstrate these characteristics, it is essential that all components be examined as the project comes to fruition and is nurtured and implemented. Although a case may be made that service learning develops citizens out of students, it is unlikely that such an outcome can be found without ensuring that adequate time is devoted to the process of creating a community of learners, nurturing strong ties with the community, and supporting the growth of all partners. For Stanley Hall students and university preservice teachers to both feel the impact of this work, it was critical that all five aforementioned requirements be incorporated in the project.

Criterion 1: Problem Solving and Conflict Resolution

Perhaps what faculty and university partners bring to the community is the opportunity to problem solve collectively, mentoring university and K–12 students in developing their interpersonal skills. That is to say, if students are to become community leaders, they must be mentored in effective skills, such as problem solving, communication, and social negotiation. Without such mentoring, these students become individuals who connect with the community as an institution.

The public art bus shelters project was not only a service-learning project but a collaborative problem-solving undertaking for high school alternative students (as they participated in Grade 9–12 academic coursework) and university students (as they participated in senior-level art and educational assessment coursework). The service-learning project combined these seemingly divergent populations by nurturing problem-solving skills and incorporating unique activities to resolve

multiple problems that affected the lives of community members.

Criterion 2: Student Reflection of Process

If service learning is just applying academics to service, then there is still the problem of the students' having an *I* experience without the reflection on how their individual behavior affected the community group. Such interaction and many students' beliefs regarding public engagement are based on binary and confrontational thinking and leadership that is strictly hierarchical. By uniting with community partners and challenging all voices to be active and engaged, students are pushed to think beyond themselves, often not an easy skill to expect of high school and college students. Moreover, youth culture does not value expertise and is under the assumption that all opinions are equally valid. This partnership required that different members performed different tasks. Whereas students gathered oral histories about Evansville's transportation and cultural history, college students facilitated the analysis of the information recovered. Art students demonstrated their expertise in the domain of design, model construction, and sketching. An architect provided expertise in design elements, effective construction materials, and developing models and sketches into buildable schematics. A local poet provided support on the elements of writing and how information reviewed for the drafts of models could be reorganized into a narrative that could educate tourists about the history behind the bus shelter designs.

Criteria 3: Expertise

One fundamental and critical characteristic realized early in the project was that of helping students develop an understanding of expertise. The role of expertise and young people's respect for it were not initially evidenced among the high school students or the university mentors. Throughout the course of

a project, everyone can be an expert at some point and to some degree; not all participants provide the same involvement, the same knowledge, and the same skills.

Activities were developed during the first 2 weeks of programming to help students recognize that they might have information and skills that could support the process of social negotiation and civic engagement. However, students did not always demonstrate the same skills, nor should be expected to have their skills prove useful in all settings or circumstances with which the group came into contact. A unique and interesting finding from the current project was the need for mentors and mentees to both work on their communication, facilitation, and sharing skills. Although we expected that the alternative students involved in the project would need some character education and work on communicating ideas effectively, we were both surprised at the need to redirect mentors to restate ideas, rethink interactions with others, and reconsider the politics of socially appropriate interactions in school and community settings. Whereas educators are often expected to understand the need for preK–12 students to require redirection in how they interact with community partners and group members, it is clear that college mentors are budding professionals who also need assistance in knowing how to work with others and negotiate new roles as professionals.

Criteria 4: Social, Citizen, and Leadership Skills

In addition to the social skills just cited, there are niceties of social behavior that have not always been transmitted to students and, perhaps, community members. To support community needs, students must be professionally engaged: They must be polite and businesslike; they must be unselfish; and they must demonstrate a disposition toward being concerned and cooperative. From the first meeting of this project, students were instructed to refer to one another as professionals by using surnames, by practicing professional communication skills,

and by thinking about how they socialize with others as members of a professional group, not as students who could not play the part of professional.

By learning these skills early, students in high school and college gain an understanding of what the community expects them to sound like (use standard English, speak clearly and concisely, utilize reflective listening skills, ask clearly stated questions) and look like (dress in business casual or professional, demonstrate how to carry oneself in a community environment). Students at all levels also began to understand that they could lead the project and guide it if they could represent themselves with competency and show a modicum of decorum within mixed company, as well as practice such representation when only students and faculty were present.

Criterion 5: Reflectivity

An ever-present challenge in research surrounding service learning is the need for and difficulty with reflectivity. Mentors, mentees, and faculty facilitators were each asked to consider what they learned each week from the experiences related to the CREATE project. Initial results of reflectivity were limited in that it was clear that each party was unaware of what reflection was and what it entailed. Although mentors and mentees could provide some generalized notions of learning from the project, they were unable to analyze how they were growing individually, professionally, and academically.

Mentors and mentees made general statements indicating a lack of comfort in sharing strengths about themselves or their abilities. This lack of self-efficacy carried over into reflections; that is, students shared concerns for “tooting their own horns” about what they were good at that week. Weekly *snaps* times were built into programming to support others in sharing praise and appreciation for individuals, whereas specific reflective questions were created to assist students in determining what strengths they had used to further the project during that week. Mentors and CREATE

facilitators were also trained in the art of making the invisible visible by asking questions to stimulate conversation with mentees about their abilities and by commenting about mentee attributes that had improved the process that week.

Conclusions and Impact on Partners

One of the most immediate challenges facing our project was that of involving expert community partners in assisting students as they researched the transportation history of the Evansville area. Community partners could share information related to their needs, but they could also represent their cultural and social expertise; that is, students came to them for resources that could inform their practice as they developed their public art bus shelters. By visiting an archivist at a local historic library, the director of an area transportation museum, and an area historian, students garnered information to assist with their project. Furthermore, these experiences radically altered the direction of the bus shelters, infusing the history, civic understanding, and culture of these community members within their drafts for the project.

One Person Cannot Run an Effective Service-Learning Initiative

Not all knowledge is equal during a service-learning project. There must be a respect for different people and the skills and knowledge that they bring to the process. This truly informs and nurtures a sense of democracy. Furthermore, it helps to educate the youth and the community partners involved in the service regarding the need for individuation of project expectations and the importance of teamwork in all phases of a project’s development.

Active Community Voice Is Critical

Oftentimes, it might appear that community partners are someone to “deal with” after a

project concept has been formulated. This mind-set organizes service-learning projects as if service is something that is “done to” the community and that community involvement means only that its members are to be served. This deficit-value model often illustrates the power dynamics that exist between the hierarchies of universities and the environments they support—that is, “we know better at the university, so we can help them by meeting their needs *for* them.” What this process does, however, is denigrate the community; it avoids the process of democratic development and encourages another form of need—namely, community members are seen as being inept and unable to solve their own problems, so the university must come and fix it for them. This notion further suggests to students at all levels that differences of power are valid and that the lack of community voice is somehow justified.

One Must Allow for Authentic and Diverse Voices

Although community partners did not affect the design of the shelters, they had an active voice in revealing personal accounts related to the transportation histories, sharing what relatives had told them or shared with them about their time working on the LSTs (landing ships, tanks), offering how life at the airport changed for family members working on the P-47 airplanes, and providing family photos of steamboats running along the Ohio River. Local artisans, such as a poet, an architect, and engineers, were able to lend their knowledge of the area in designing the physical structures from the plans of students.

The Product Must Be the Focus of the Project

As one example of effective pedagogical practices, service learning must demonstrate outcomes that can verify evidence of mastery of academic standards as well as illuminate that the community need has been met. By starting the resulting product early in the project’s creation, community members and teachers can

confirm that the project has been successful academically and socially.

The current project was no exception to this rule: Mentors, mentees, community members, and facilitators worked vigorously during the first weeks of the project to detail what would result upon completion of the bus shelters. An organized list of weekly activities was created, although, as is common in the practice of engagement, sometimes the best-laid plans require modification. The art mentors and student mentees were to focus on the CREATE bus shelter products—three examples of public art bus shelters that represent the transportation history of the area. Facilitators planned community excursions, meetings with key community partners, and opportunities to work with professionals from various fields to provide knowledge and skills that could improve production.

One Need Provide an Experience for Students at All Levels to Reconnect With Community

Finally and perhaps most important, the process of engagement provides educators and citizens an opportunity to reclaim power over their schools and communities. Using academic and creative disciplines to democratically solve community problems provides a real-world focus to education, giving community partners a sense of the strength of our schools and helping to accentuate the strengths of our students (unlike high-stakes accountability tests).

As identified in this article, the climate of the school environment, the community, the curriculum, and the learner are interdependent. Learners in secondary and higher education function better in an environment that is intriguing, provides multiple sensory experiences, involves dynamic problems without singular answers, and incorporates members of the community into the curriculum (key components of service learning). Teachers, principals, and community members can construct a real-world environment that affords students the opportunity to collaborate and work with information in personal and individual ways

rather than in ways already identified and constructed by the teacher.

Over the course of our experiences in working with students at the secondary and college levels, they indicated the aforementioned suggestions as being of assistance in creating a curriculum that accepts the ideas of students and teachers and is open to community involvement. Other suggestions that might be helpful include the following:

- Be open to perceiving new information about people and to looking at them in new ways.
- Provide a multidimensional classroom/home/community environment; provide students and children with opportunities to work on a variety of tasks using different materials.
- Ask open-ended questions about people's abilities: When assessing them, ask, "What can you tell me about yourself? Why is this important?"
- Listen attentively to what children, parents, and community members say.
- Help children identify their own positive and prosocial behavior.
- Help all members of the community (including students) feel competent in a variety of areas.
- Provide new challenges and provide comments on positive attempts.
- Teach strategies to accomplish tasks, not just learn factual information.
- Provide opportunities for choice, initiative, and autonomy.

As members of American society, we need to realize that our perceptions and those of students are affected by our implicit ideas on the construction of education and the construction of the classroom. Our perceptions of our roles as teachers, learners, and citizens have implications for our practice within the contexts of the classroom. We need to be attentive in our work with students in the classroom environment. We must also explore the meaningful relationships and knowledge developments that occur among learners, teachers, communities, and the curriculum. This aware-

ness can become an intentional element of the curricular process. ^{SUP}

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