A Campus-based Service-learning Elective Course: Design, Implementation, and Reflection

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Background

- Course: **SLP101/1101 Community Engagement through Service-Learning**
  - Semester 2, 2013-14
    - Late January – early May, 2014
- Class size: 9
  - Exchange students from the US: 2 (third-year/senior)
  - Local students: 7 (freshmen, second-year/sophomore)
- Three S-L groups:
  - The Leftovers
  - South Asian Salvation
  - SKH
Course Planning and Design

November, 2013
- Development of course framework
  - Syllabus, course objectives and outcomes, course materials, assessment rubrics, guidelines for reflection
- Recruitment of peer mentor (service-learning TA)

December 2013
- Contacting and meeting with potential community partners
  - Examine community needs
  - Identify appropriate course objectives
  - Establish sustainable partnership within the community

January 2014
- Double-checking class list
- Confirmation of class composition with community partners
Course Planning and Design

• One of the community partners withdrew before the semester began
  • Major concern from community supervisor and target service recipients: **Language**

• Changes on course design
  • Community-based S-L → campus-based S-L
    • Re-defining “community”: Campus as a living-learning community
  • Benefits of on-campus S-L (McDonald & Dominguez, 2015)
    • Proximity to classroom
    • Accessibility to student services, organizations and residential halls
    • Easier planning for the projects (esp. for students new to S-L/LN)
Course Planning and Design

- New elements in course syllabus and design
  - Responsibilities and liabilities
    - Students, peer mentor (S-L TA), course instructors (and community partners)
  - Rough breakdown of the 25 service hours
  - Expected study load

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expected Study Load</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activities</td>
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<td>Lectures</td>
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<td>Tutorials</td>
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<td>Fieldwork</td>
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<td>Reading/self-study</td>
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<td>Essay writing</td>
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<td>Presentation (including preparation)</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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Course Planning and Design

• Student success is a **shared responsibility**
  • Students take greater responsibility for their own learning
    • Assumption: No one knows students’ learning needs better than they do
  • Commitment to become future leaders
    • Ability to analyze, interpret, evaluate and solve problems to make informed decisions

• Role of course instructors (faculty staff)
  • To offer nurturing and caring support for students to succeed
  • To provide continuous trainings that help students to meet their learning needs
  • To create greater and long-term educational impacts on both teaching and learning

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Course Implementation

• Orientation during the first lecture
  • “Every campus has a … sustainability context” (Carleton College)
  • Emphasis on sustainable development
  • Both learning and impact on community (campus)
    • Educational and service impact won’t stop once the semester is over
    • Social transformation: changing-making → new opportunities for students themselves and the community

• Learning objectives and expected learning outcomes

• Class survey
  • Students’ expectation to the course
  • Sample questions:
    • Why did you decide to venture a foreign land?
    • Is Hong Kong a just society? Why?
    • What do you hope to gain from attending this course?
    • Anything else to share with the course instructors and service-learning tutor?
Course Implementation

- Seminars on need assessment, goal-setting and project evaluation
- Two reflective meetings with each S-L group
  - Progress report
  - Reflection on group and individual learning journey
- Reflection as a meaning-making process
  - Making sense and interpretation of S-L experience in terms of self
    - Transformation of experience to knowledge
    - Steps of reflection
  - Critical thinking and self-reflection skills
  - Assessment: Reflective journals at different points
Course Implementation

Reflection from a Performance Perspective
(Burke, 1969; Goffman, 1959; McAleavey, 1996)
Course Implementation

• Course content changed in response to students’ learning
  • To address specific challenges and issues faced in S-L projects
  • Examples
    • Food waste in student canteen $\rightarrow$ land fill, food waste in HK, food and dining culture in HK
    • Southeast Asian kids in neighborhood (Fu Tai) $\rightarrow$ population changes, social welfare and ethnic minorities in HK
    • Working conditions of cleaning ladies in student hostels $\rightarrow$ inequalities in modern societies, labor segregation
Course Implementation

• Reminder of course objectives and assessment rubrics
  • Common problem: service >> learning
    • The missing connection between service and learning

• Importance of turning findings and experiences into something useful to the community (campus)
  • Deliverables
    • Sharing of findings and facts to the community, e.g. ILP programme
    • Submitting findings and recommendations to particular units and committees, e.g. the Leftovers submitted a proposal to the Catering Committee
    • Recording a video for the community partner and future students
Personal Reflection

- Course content tailor-made for specific learning needs and social issues
- Regular course meetings and activities
- Course syllabus with clear guidelines and instructions
- Empowerment of community partners and students
- Personal mentoring
  - Close mentoring, supervision and encouragement on each individual students possible in small-class settings
  - Help and guidance for individual students to navigate their lives the way they desire (esp. future development)
- Sustainability
  - On-going service-learning project development and impact on community
  - Long-term collaboration between faculty and community partner
References


