Evidence of SoTL: The Service Community and the Student

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EVIDENCE OF SoTL:
The service community and the student

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Abstract

Much has been written on the multiple theories of learning (Marsh, 2007), and it is generally acknowledged that service learning, as a serious pedagogical approach, has a positive effect on the students’ ability to apply what they have learned in the “real world”. (Miller, 1994). We wanted to substantiate that service learning within a 360° paradigm – a broader relationship between student, school, organization and community -- equaled richer learning outcomes in communications related to social change.
Service Learning within 360° paradigm

Partnerships are traditionally two-part

- School
- Social services organization

Recent research (Figueroa et al, 2002) on communication as an element in social change depends on dialogue between four dimensions, broadly interpreted as:

- Student & school
- Social services organization & community
Columbia College Chicago & Critical Encounters Project

Mission: Columbia College Chicago
- Columbia's intent is to educate students who will ... author the culture of their times ... and serve important civic purpose by active engagement in the life and culture of the city of Chicago.

Mission: Critical Encounters
- Intends to be a model for interactive, community-inclusive civic engagement that exploits and explores the relationship between art and social science, artistic action and revolution.
Students in Social Change Communication course

Principles guiding course (Friedland, 2001):
1. Inextricable link between communication and public policy
2. Communication strategies can promote social causes & issues
3. Acts of advocacy can change society in a positive way

Student composition:
19 students -- 4 male; 15 female
1 FR; 3 SO; 1 JR; 14 SR
15 Marketing Communication majors
1 each Journalism, Interdisciplinary, Fiction Writing
SSHC is dedicated to identifying and addressing the health and social support needs of African American families in the Roseland community in Chicago who are at risk for negative health and life outcomes.

MISSION
Providing people with positive and healthy alternatives by interactions among children/youth, adults, community based organizations, the faith-based community, schools, city, state and federal government, law enforcement and the private sector.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE
Our agency’s program structure is founded on health service areas of need by the African American community. Service programs include:

- Comprehensive HIV/AIDS services
- Case management for people living with HIV/AIDS and their families
- Youth Self-Enhancement Programs and C.R.E.A.T.E, an interactive arts program for youth;
Mission

The mission of the AIDS Foundation of Chicago is to lead the fight against HIV/AIDS and improve the lives of people affected by the epidemic by collaborating with community organizations.
Integrated model

Columbia College Chicago + Critical Encounters  Students = Social Change Communication

AIDS Foundation of Chicago  Southside Help Center
Good practices for pedagogy

Eight of ten principles (Howard, 1993) going for us:

1. Academic credit is for learning
2. Established learning objectives
3. Established criteria for selection of partner
4. Prepare students for learning from community
5. Minimize disconnect between learning at Help Center and in classroom
6. Faculty role was non-directional
7. Prepared for some variation, and loss of control, in outcomes
8. Maximize community responsibility in orientation
Goal: intentional learners

**Purposeful learning**

Students would:

- See connections in disparate information
- Adapt skills learned in one area to answer problems encountered in another
Three overarching goals

1. Students would demonstrate an increased sense of power to impact their world
   - Miller (1997)
   - Nnakwe (1999)
Three overarching goals

2. Demonstrate the ability to be empowered communicators (Ramaley et al, 2002)
Three overarching goals

3. Demonstrate intellectual agility and ability to manage change
   • (Howard, 1993)
Model: assessing service learning

Driscoll et al (1996)

“There are and have been multiple projects focused on student outcomes. . . little effort toward multiple constituencies to effectively evaluate . . . commitment to service-learning in the curriculum. . .”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Measurements</th>
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<td>Valid contribution; personal satisfaction in experience</td>
<td>Interview; partner satisfaction; quality of deliverables</td>
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<td>Teaching methods</td>
<td>Avoid traditional models of directive faculty interaction</td>
<td>Observation; syllabus analysis</td>
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<td>Student Variables</td>
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<td>Increased sense of power</td>
<td>Role in group; interaction with Southside to interpret, evaluate, use information</td>
<td>Interviews, group report-outs</td>
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<td>Empowered communicators</td>
<td>Communicate in diverse settings and groups using written, oral and visual means</td>
<td>Campaign plan, portfolio of deliverables</td>
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<td>Intellectual agility and ability to manage change</td>
<td>Ability to construct plan and portfolio when information is incomplete and/or missing</td>
<td>Consensus building within group; client report-out</td>
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<td>Nature of partnership</td>
<td>Present activities and quality of deliverables</td>
<td>Satisfaction in outcomes/deliverables</td>
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<td>Satisfaction with College &amp; student interactions</td>
<td>Establishment of ongoing relationship</td>
<td>Interview</td>
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<td>Student ability to “speak the language of the Center”</td>
<td>Client satisfaction with student interaction &amp; deliverables</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship management: student to Center to Foundation to Columbia</td>
<td>Focus on interaction between Center and Students</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
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Methodology: Preparing to launch

Validated the service learning opportunity
Engaged clearing house
Met with executive director of Help Center
Methodology: Launch

Students researched organization, prepared for visit from Help Center execs

Executive director and operations manager of Help Center met in-class with students
  - Help Center = students’ client

Students did on-site visit; in-depth penetration

Subsequent in-class report-out of observations & learnings

Students then developed goals and ground rules for the project
Methodology: Student teams

Four groups of five each
- Fundraising
- Volunteerism
- Promotion & media outreach
- Research

Astin et al:
Students will discuss their experiences with one another
The more the broadly-defined community is involved and committed, the higher the sense of collective self-efficacy within the community’s members
Methodology: Student peer evaluation

Reality check

Evaluation matrix (Christopherson, 2004)

Students rated by group members on three variables:

- Attendance and cooperation
- Academic contribution
- Team player
Methodology:
The roadmap = communication plan

Why develop a plan?
- Blueprint for activity
- Provides structure for orchestrating the project

Student plans with deliverables related to determinants
Methodology: Bumps along the road

Executive Director in “client” presentation to review students’ plans
- Assumed that Help Center had modest budget to pay for deliverables related to fundraising
- Students in group apply for grant

First learning – Don’t assume anything; define who has what resources and get consensus before taking action
Methodology: Big potholes in the road

Students + the client relationship

Students stood still for one week

After two weeks, instructor reached out to Help Center

After three weeks, instructor contacts AIDS Foundation
Methodology: Breakdown on the road

To students: “This is a learning, it’s just not the learning we had envisioned.”

In the meantime . . .
Methodology: Students learn to shift gears

Students assigned to research a report on policy issues associated with HIV/AIDS

Visit to Community Media Workshop

Two additional weeks went by with no contact – total of 5 weeks
Methodology: Tow-truck arrives

Executive director: “I had no idea the quality of your work would be this good.”

Second learning – You can’t reinforce and/or clarify expectations too much regarding deliverables

Third learning – In real world, agencies use Conference Memos; should have modeled the real world in class, too
Methodology: Sideswiped on the road

Students learn the hard way

Fourth learning – Student default will be to promise something they may not be able to deliver; given prior history, we should have had the students prepare for worst case scenario
Methodology: Finally, the end of the road

Hand-off day =

Executive director and key management ask students to volunteer, prepare deliverables, orchestrate media outreach for National HIV Testing Week, June 20 – 26

Fifth learning – Go figure: There are learnings to be had, at all levels, all the time
What the students said: One

Fundraising team: “It was hard to really get this project going because of difference obstacles we had to overcome. Although we were unable to raise the $500 that was our goal, we have given the Help Center the materials to do so. Also by giving them the buttons, we are helping them to get their name out there.”

Promotions & media outreach: “As a group, it is needless to say that this type of classroom work and experience far exceeds anything you will learn from a textbook. Most of us are graduating soon, and are going to be doing this or similar type work. We now have learned some things that do and don’t work, and also how they might work in different circumstances. When things go wrong, this is when you do your best to turn them around and make them go right.”
What the students said: Two

Volunteerism team: “I am very satisfied with the work we were able to accomplish. It really made me feel good to hear (name of Executive Director) say how impressed she was with our professionalism and work. I enjoyed every second of working on the volunteer aspect. Though the class portion is finished, (name of team member) and I are not done working with the Help Center. I intend to volunteer in the fall.”

Research team: “The overall experience was a lesson learned. When working with nonprofit organizations, make sure the organization you work with is willing to communicate openly with you. Working with the kids was a blast, but I wouldn’t work with the Help Center again. They mean well, but they are just not ready for what we offered to them.”
Did we succeed?

Measured against the three overarching goals, it was an 
even better real-world experience than we had planned

B U T . . .
Evaluation: Student

Assessing student learning with multiple constituencies

Student

- Student peer evaluation conformed with what instructor had observed in group performance related to elements of communication plan
- Some reported real frustration with Help Center experience, but a deeper understanding of AIDS-related issues and public policy
Evaluation: College/Critical Encounters

Against multiple constituencies
- On a self-reported basis, yes
- On a formal, institutionalized basis, jury’s still out

S O . . .

Developed a rubric for identifying community service organizations (adapted from Troppe, 1996)
Rubric: Community service organization

Community service organization:
1. What are its goals?
2. How long has it been operating?
3. Who does it serve?
4. How many volunteers serve the organization?
5. Have Columbia students served there before?
6. What is its structure?
7. How is it funded?
8. How does it interact with surrounding community?
Rubric: Student learning opportunity

Student:
- What expectations does the organization have of students?
- What skills or qualities can students develop as a result of working with this organization?
- What type of service does the agency need?
- Do the students have the skills and knowledge to make a meaningful contribution?
- Are students’ expectations of their ability to contribute realistic?
- What type of orientation is available for students from organization’s members/staff?
- Who supervises the students?
- Opportunities for regular interaction with agency personnel?
- What kind of feedback will students receive from management staff?
- Nuts & bolts
Evaluation: Southside Help Center

Founder of Help Center said: “Never has anyone done this much to help us. Can we count on you next year?”

Executive director said: “We’re pleased with the connection with your class. You brought creative ideas we’d never thought of. And we just never had the time to write the news release, and you have. We appreciate your hard work and efforts. It was a good idea to come to work with the Columbia students.”

And: “We think the process has been good and we’ve had good communication with you.”
Evaluation: AIDS Foundation of Chicago

The president of the Foundation:

“Columbia had the bigger win in this situation. When a real-life situation translates into learning, it can effect the students for the rest of their lives.”

And: “Success equals the students’ personal satisfaction with a valid contribution. For them, this experience has been a reality check. Students have been introduced to the true grit of real world situations.”
What’s next?

Does the 360° approach really facilitate student learning? If so, what about it works? What doesn’t?

What about the experience caused the students to learn? Does that learning connect to the real world? If so, can it be replicated?
REFERENCES


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