

Integrating Art Based Service Projects into the Curriculum

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Description

This presentation will examine how art based civic engagement projects integrated into the curriculum create opportunities for students to engage with their community and develop a sense of personal responsibility and citizenship. Integrating art into service learning activities attracts students to outreach programs and inspires continued community participation through evidence of success. During the presentation we will examine a service learning project, as well as actively engage in a community art making activity.

Session Objectives

- Map successes and failures of art based service learning projects
- Explore History of Community Art
- How to get started—Integrating an art project into your curriculum
- Approaching community partners and identifying achievable goals and objectives
- In-kind Donations
- Mapping the project so to promote inclusiveness and accessibility
- Engaging all participants
- Importance of ongoing reflection and class time to overall student success
- Assessment
- Value of final celebration through exhibit or unveiling
- Experience a community art making activity

Motivation

Collaborative art making calls on one's social skills of listening, negotiating, participation and reflection. There is an inherent democratic experience as the arts encourage a sharing of oneself and a willingness to accept others. Working along side people from different communities encourages self reflection as students consider their place in the world and long to better understand the place or perspective of the participants/community members. Through creating a shared vision a new community is formed—one that is based on the ideals of collaboration. Both students and community partners can claim ownership of a successful community art project—one that takes into account inclusiveness, cultural sensitivity and a commitment to engaging all participants equally.

From a pedagogical point of view establishing a creative outlet for the knowledge gained in a class gives students an opportunity to practically use that knowledge. An art project that directly reflects the key elements of the class will encourage students' creativity as well as their ability to think critically and practically, enhancing and reinforcing the class curriculum. Through their conversations and interactions with a community, students learn about the issues and concerns of that community encouraging a new perspective. The shared experience of making art together opens both students and the community members to a clearer understanding and personal knowledge of one another. This enhanced knowledge of others will undoubtedly lead to more shared experiences and further interactions.

Through thoughtful and deliberate planning an art based service learning project can enhance community/university relationships. Evidence of success through either the final

product or the on-going process of collaborative art making, supports and helps to deepen these relationships allowing them to continue and evolve.

Case Study

Community Art in a Rural Environment

This course explored the unique dynamics of creating art in a rural environment and specifically how to build community through the arts. Students learned the history and theory of community based practice and the relevant social issues that community arts can examine. Students made art, became aware of funding and volunteering opportunities and worked collaboratively on an art based service learning project. We examined community arts programs in Maine, Ireland and Northern Ireland, studying their social and economic value and developed individual community initiatives based on each student's artistic ideas.

Community Partner

A Day center for mentally challenged individuals in Northern Maine

Our community partner was a day center for people with mental disabilities.

Approximately 20-25 clients would visit the center each day. In collaboration with the centers director and the program coordinator we established a weekly two hour art making and conversation workshop that would meet the same time for an eight week time period. Over eight week's students from the Community Art in a Rural Environment class worked in collaboration with the day center clients in the creation of individual art works.

Projects:

1. Conversation and Water Color Painting
2. Personal Boxes
3. Self Portrait

In class before the first visit we prepared for working with the clients at the day center, we role played as to what situations could happen and discussed what to do when in need of support. Our first visit was a meet and greet. During this visit the clients and students discussed what type of art should be made. The students then discussed the ideas in class and established the three projects. The decision was made early on not to create any permanent art in the center based on input from the center's administration.

The three art making experiences brought certain challenges and rewards. Some clients struggled with the materials while others did not want to move onto the next project. The box making was the most difficult project as folding the paper to create the box proved difficult for many of the clients. With staff assistance we were able to successfully complete all the boxes. The self portrait collages were very successful as students first interviewed each client asking them questions ranging from their favorite color and animal to what the day center meant to them. These interviews were used to prepare collage imagery for the clients. The final self portrait collage truly represented the collaborative efforts between the clients and students. We completed our work at the center with a presentation of these framed self portraits to each client.

Assessment/Reflection

Each student journaled throughout the service project and wrote a reflection/assessment paper of the project at the end of the semester. As a class we reflected on our time at the center after each visit in the local café. We discussed successes and failures of the day

and what we should adjust for our next visit (when one of my students made a strong connection with a blind client for example, it was decided he would work one on one with him the rest of the time). I held a final meeting with the centers administration and reviewed the project as well.

Conclusion

The project met both the needs of the community partner and students. The students practiced collaborative art making in a community setting and the clients were given the opportunity to express themselves artistically and share their stories and experiences. Over the eight weeks the students from class made huge strides. The students entered the space unsure of their roles and how they would be accepted by the clients. But by the end of the semester each had felt a sense of accomplishment. The project had fully engaged and challenged each student. There was a feeling amongst all the students that they had brought a new sense of community to the center through the art making projects. The students were enriched by their service and I was encouraged to believe they would continue to be active citizens after the semester. There was a consensus that there should be a continued relationship between the center and the university.