Journal of Pedagogic Development
Volume 7, Issue 2

Education for Citizenship: Measuring the Impact on Learners of the Community-Based Learning Program in Palestine

Abdel Karim Daragmeh, The Center for Excellence in Learning, An-Najah National University, Palestine
Emad Basheer Dawwas, Urban Planning, An-Najah National University, Palestine
Contact: adaragmeh@najah.edu

Abstract
The community-based learning (CBL) methodology was introduced at An-Najah University, Palestine for the first time through an initiative led by the Center for Excellence in Learning in 2013. The initial objectives for the CBL scheme were set at three different, yet interrelated aspects. On one hand, the learning environment was expanded to include direct engagement with the Palestinian community organizations through implementing need based projects for these organizations. On the other hand, through such engagement the learners were expected to develop key critical thinking skills which included self-learning, decision making, and testing theoretical models as they relate to community problems. Additionally, and as a direct impact for this initiative, it was hoped that the community work will prepare the learners for their responsibilities as Palestinian citizens.

This research project is intended to measure the direct impact that the CBL program had on the learners' skills on all three levels. This will be done by interviewing a representative sample from CBL participant groups. To measure the indirect impact on the CBL participants, the research will report on any unanticipated outcomes resulting from the CBL experience. In other words, this research will highlight the snowballing effect for the CBL program – aspects of growth in the learners experience beyond the originally planned objectives.

Background

An-Najah National University (ANU) has taken many steps towards achieving its goal in improving the educational opportunities in for its students. As part of the university's vision to better serve its students and the community, the center for Excellence in learning and teaching (CELT) was established in 2012 to lead the effort towards improving the quality of education on campus. Since its establishment, CELT has been working to enhance the teaching and learning environments at ANU by designing and implementing programs, services, and activities which are intended to improve students' learning through using more learner-centered and applied learning approaches to teaching.

In August 2013, The Center for Excellence launched its community-based learning program- the first in Palestine. The program included the planning, design and implementation for ten CBL courses from the faculties of Education, Engineering, Medicine, Veterinary Medicine, Humanities, and Media and Social Sciences. The implementation of the ten courses was completed in May, 2014.

The CELT community-based learning initiative focused on engaging learners with the surrounding community. We based our approach in engaging with the Palestinian community organizations on international scholarship about the nature, scope and outcome of such engagements. For example, the campus Task Force for Civic Engagement in Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis defined civic engagement as 'active collaboration that builds on the resources, skills, expertise, and knowledge of the campus and community to improve the quality of life in communities in a manner that is consistent with the campus mission.' The partner organizations for CBL courses work can include non-profit, government, and business organizations (Bringle et al., p. 70). The CBL engagement may include 'teaching, research, or service that is done in and with the community' (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009, p. 39).

All these definitions share one common emphasis on active community role and the mutually beneficial partnerships. Having committed ourselves to this kind of mutuality in the relationship with our community partners, we assumed that the benefits for students are invaluable. The learners get to know the target community- their potential future employers- up-close. They learn to negotiate with partners, to determine and meet their needs, and to present solutions to real and complex problems. In turn, the target organizations will benefit when they have their projects, which need much time, effort and work force, done for them by the students and their teachers. Examples of projects accomplished in this program included: building Geographic Information Systems (GIS) database for city councils, designing online supplementary materials for public schools, designing nutrition protocols for diabetic patients, designing teaching aids for English language classes, parking space design in Nablus city, and website design for Non-Governmental Organizations.

The teachers who designed and implemented these courses had very limited experience in undertaking systematic engagements with community organizations; therefore, they received capacity building in how to redesign and implement courses which address community needs. The capacity building package for the participating faculty included three modules: (1) an introductory workshop on what CBL is, why we use it in teaching, and how we implement CBL classes by presenting a number of CBL examples. The participants were then asked to select one of their courses and to start working on redesigning it; (2) the workshop was followed by one-on-one consultation to review the suggested CBL courses before final approval; (3) a second workshop was held in order to introduce evaluation and assessment techniques which can be used in their courses, with special focus on evaluating the team performance and field work activities. To ensure quality implementation, and by way of monitoring performance, the CBL

teachers were invited to participate in two group discussion meetings which were intended for smoothing out any challenges they faced in dealing with the community partners, the students and any other logistic and administrative challenges. By mid-semester, The CBL students were given the chance to make mid-point presentations about the progress in their projects in front of other CBL teachers and students.

For over three years now, CELT has managed to make the CBL initiative into a sustainable approach in many disciplines. The faculty members who are interested in using this new pedagogy are provided with training and are given useful information on CBL course designs, such as The CBL User Guide, sample CBL courses, contact information for potential community partners, and other needed guidance.

The purpose of the research

A program impact evaluation is used to systematically collect information about the activities and outcomes of any program to help make judgments about the program and to improve its effectiveness. Evaluation is deemed important because 'it helps to determine whether it works, refines program delivery, and provides evidence for continuing support of the program.'[1]

This research project is intended to measure and evaluate the direct impact that the CBL program had on the learners' critical thinking skills (skill added value), their citizenship value system (learn to do vs. learn to serve), levels of (dis)satisfaction with the quality of the CBL projects. To measure any indirect impact on the CBL participants, the researchers will document, categorize and explain any unanticipated outcomes resulting from this experience. Consequently, this research will highlight aspects of growth in the learners experience beyond the originally planned objectives.

Based on the evaluation data, the research will offer useful information at the level of course design for future CBL practitioners. It will also provide significant conclusions for centers of teaching and learning and for civic engagement centers which may want to introduce new community-based course schemes on their campuses.

Method

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with sixty CBL participants who were randomly selected from among the two hundred fifty students registered in the ten CBL classes. For convenience sake, the sixty informants were divided into three groups of twenty and were interviewed for two-three hours each. This design made it easier for the researchers to explain interview questions to a smaller group, and it gave the informants more chance to participate in the ongoing discussion. The interview included twenty questions covering four major themes. **On learners' role in selecting and implementing the project**, we wanted to find out if the project was given by the teacher, selected by the students, or selected based on a specific need identified in collaboration with community organizations; and, as far as the project quality is concerned, we wanted to see first if the students were satisfied with the quality of their projects and whether the community played any role in deciding the quality. **On the match between the theoretical and practical components**, we wanted to measure the extent to which the theoretical models were applicable in the field and whether the theory was delivered on time to match with the practical activities. **On the course skill added value**, the questions were meant to collect data on self-learning, decision making, and the testing of theoretical models as they relate to community problems. **On democracy and citizenship education**, the questions focused on the conflict resolution and decision making mechanism inside the team, learners' readiness to change, and their ability to cope with frustrations which may likely result from dealing with non-cooperating community partners. Additionally, we sought evidence on whether the CBL experience has triggered any voluntary work beyond the course experience, i.e. after the learners completed the project for this course. Finally, we

[1] World Health Organization. How to evaluate the program. [Cited 29 Dec 2013]. Available from URL: http://www.who.int/roadsafety/projects/manuals/alcohol/4-How%20to.pdf.

wanted to measure their perception of the role of gender in accomplishing project tasks and in dealing with male or female community partners. These were the envisioned learning values for the CBL experience; however, we meant to verify other indirect impacts which may have resulted from learners engagements with community partners.

The following sections treat each of the four major impact categories under a separate heading. Any indirect impact related to any particular category is listed and treated immediately under the relevant section.

CBL project selection and learner involvement:
The project timely selection and integration into the course syllabus is an integral and important part in planning for the CBL classes. Teachers are often faced with a number of options when it comes to how much learner involvement they would allow in selecting course projects. The participant responses revealed four different ways their teacher used for project selection; these are classified into four levels of learner immersion. The first way is for the teacher to assess potential and relevant community needs. Once the needs are felt, only the most relevant ones to the course theoretical content are selected and integrated. It is assumed here that the teacher is the one who better understands the community needs. Another way this may happen is when the community contacts the teacher or the civic engagement center with a specific need. Here, the community is the one who determines the nature and scope of the intervention. In the third scenario, the learners are required to find their own projects by observing the community to determine their needs and decide on the projects by themselves. The final scenario for project selection is to determine the need by the teacher and the students in a meeting with the community. In this case, the students will have a clearer understanding of the community need.

The four ways are represented in the selection ladder as in figure (1):

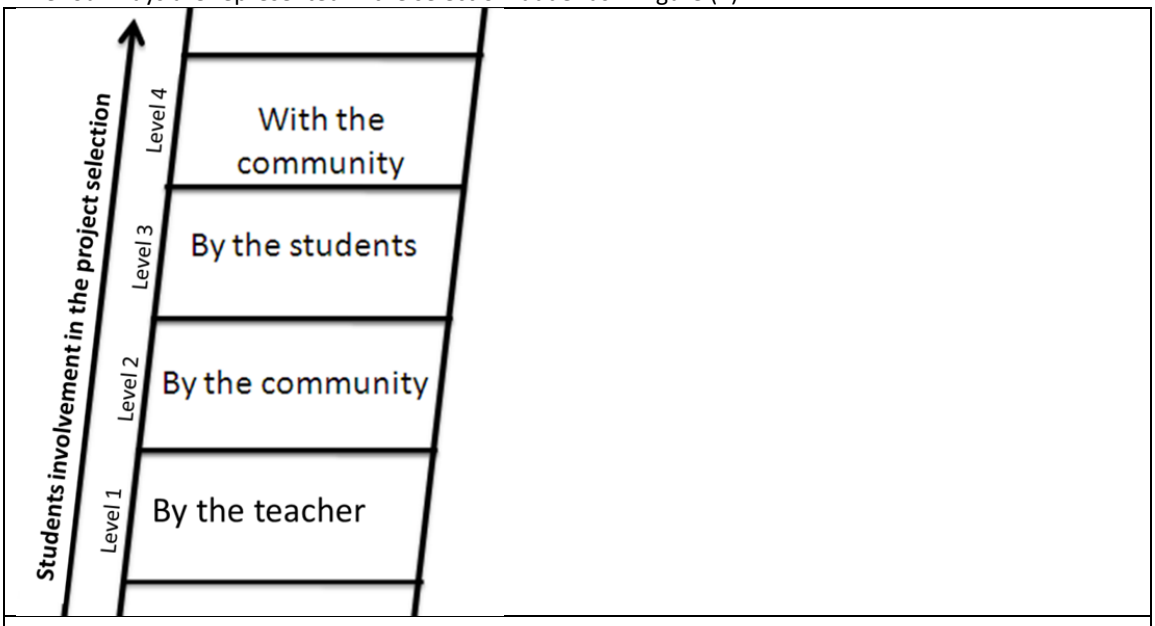


Figure (1): CBL Project Selection Ladder

Option 1 is the most teacher-centered of all; it has the advantage of increasing the level of certainty in the course implementation but the learner involvement in defining the problem and assessing the community need will remain at its lowest. For example, the learners reported that the English supplementary material project was given to them by the teacher who divided it into three sub-projects – materials for the writing skill, materials for the listening skill, and materials for reading. The learners

did not have much say in the project nature or the language skill targeted in the project. When the project is defined by the community as in option 2, the level of collaboration from the community partner will more likely be satisfactory and the learners' involvement will slightly increase as they will have to later explore the specific phases and the scope of work. The project on designing parking space for Nablus city was provided by the municipality planning engineers who limited the requirement to conducting a diagnostic study of the parking problems in the city. With option 3, the learner involvement will significantly increase as they work independently to locate partners and define their needs. In this example, our informants reported that they had spent internship time in the community organization and they spotted weak performance areas which they decided to address in their projects. The target partner remained disinterested because they were not directly consulted in defining their priorities. The students in this case met the class requirement but they failed to engage the community. The fourth scenario is the most desired one because of the high level of involvement of all stakeholders from the beginning of the process. The community partner and the GIS project students met either in class or in the municipality and together they defined the community need. In this case, the partner played a main role in defining the need which brought the highest level of collaboration and highest level of clarity about the need and the learning outcome. For that reason, it is likely to result in the best CBL experience.

Recommendations:

1. For the majority of the students, the CBL experience was a new one; hence the ones with less experience preferred that the teacher selects the project; however, students with previous experience had no problem with going to the community to define their needs and design their own project. As shown in figure (1), to ensure better quality CBL experience, the learners may be granted more freedom in selecting the nature and scope of CBL projects in more advanced courses when they had more experience and can independently deal with the community organizations to define their needs in due time.
2. Some students, especially those with some experience in community engagement, preferred scenario 2 over 3 because they wanted to work on projects in which they are interested and which simultaneously address a community need. To cater for these highly independent learners, and to ensure that they are working with cooperating partners, we undertook to prepare a pool of projects for students to select from; such project pooling work would be beyond the course teachers' capacity if we take into account the time needed for identifying a large number of projects for students to select from. The CELT surveyed the needs for thirty community organizations from the sectors of education, local government, and women organization, and then they hosted a meeting for the teachers and potential partners who worked together on matching them with courses from different disciplines. In surveying community needs, we adopted the sector-based approach, one possible variation to the issue-based approach suggested by Barbara Holland who aptly argued that to ensure sustainability of the CBL work, practitioners need to focus on a 'few specific but broadly framed public issues to increase the potential for measurable change and progress for all involved.' Ours was a sector focused needs assessment survey which resulted in providing teachers and students with 30 projects from each sector- a pool large enough for them to conveniently select projects based on interest. The resulting projects were published on CELT website for easy access by CBL course teachers and students.

Coping with frustration during data collection

The students reported having to deal with frustrations when collecting data from community organizations. They had to manage situations of high uncertainty; demotivated partners; and lack of trust in learners' abilities. For example, during field surveys some families thought that the students are tax officers disguising as university students. In another situation, the school English teachers claimed that their pupils' skills are excellent and they needed no help because they took the student teams for English language supervisors from the district ministry office. More frustrating situations came from group dynamics, e.g. cases where 'it was difficult to coordinate among us to visit; we had a lot of

problems with each other; some students left the group and some remained non-engaged to the end.' The strategies the CBL students used to cope with these and similar situations were quite informative for teachers who guide CBL work, since preparing the learners for such ill-defined encounters may help reduce the risk of demotivated or frustrated learners. Table (1) below presents the types of challenges and the reported strategies used in dealing with them.

Table (1): Challenges encountered during data collection and the corresponding strategies as reported by the students

Type of challenge	Strategy
Working through real world situations with high uncertainty. Our questions received open-ended answers which left us unsure about project requirements.	S1: Probing and prompting. We learned to ask more questions than usual and this became a habit. We do more probing when investigating requirements and work scope.
Partner did not cooperate and was unwilling to reveal data	S2: Delivering quality outputs. We worked on increasing community partner confidence by presenting high quality deliverables which can be put into use to serve the partner need.
We faced some problems when parents were giving unreliable data about the number of children in the house or the family monthly income.	S3: Data screening. We developed more sense of the data accuracy and meaning and a sense of responsibility towards the project .We had to learn to distinguish reliable from unreliable data provided by subjects in the field.
Teachers from public schools tried to hide the language competency weaknesses of their students.	S4: Building trust with the community. We learned to negotiate with them and to convince them to allow us to run diagnostic test for the pupils' skills. S5: Using alternative data collection procedure-using informal meetings with target groups-meeting the students outside school.
Negative attitude from the community partner because they were not involved in defining their need.	S6: Using connections (friends and acquaintances) to access target organizations. S7: We learned to cope with such situation by providing alternative options when original plans did not work. We selected alternative institutions when target community did not collaborate well.
Delay in work completion by team members	S8: Dividing tasks based on skill each team member has and managing team stress working against deadlines.

The students did not report any single case of total frustration where they have given up on the project. They could always find ways to cope with the frustrations resulting from dealing with challenges of working in the field.

Coping with frustration both within the team and when dealing with community organizations is important to prepare students for non-transparent, bureaucratic and uncertain conditions which are commonly encountered when doing voluntary work in public and civil society organizations in the Arab world.

Recommendation:

1. Clearly the learners could collect the data for their projects and were able to cope with frustrations coming from dealing with non-collaborating or non-transparent community partners; however, the most frustrating experience was dealing with their team mates. It is recommended

that teachers develop needed tools and mechanisms to follow up on work progress both inside the teams and with the community. This can be done through requiring mid-term presentations on project, writing progress reports or completing standardized data collection forms.

Decision making and democratic training

At this point, the students were asked to report on decision making inside the team. They were requested to respond to two specific questions: What decisions you made to complete the project? How many of those decisions were your own and how many were the teacher's questions?

The learners reported that they made decisions related to all project phases by relying on their own planning and management skills. Only once did they have to consult with the teacher in a case which required technical advice. In this particular case, they had to plan rescue areas for GIS earthquake simulations based on advice and ideas from the teacher. In the majority of the cases, however, they relied on their own resources to address project challenges. For example, when the whole class had to do one project, the data collection procedure had to be clarified to a large group. They decided to hold one meeting for the whole group to ensure common understanding of the questionnaire requirements by large group. When they had to work against deadlines towards the end of the course, they had to plan and manage the task division activities and to set up contingency plans.

There were times when they had to make decisions in the field. For example, they were sometimes denied access to important data; in such cases they had to find alternative ways to get the data. They had connections within the organization whom they used to access needed data. One other important decision is that they consciously worked to create a culture of professionalism among themselves, where they learned to distinguish types of relationships- friendship and business had to be set apart from each other. When they had to work with an inefficient leader who could not get the team members to meet or who submitted late work, they had to change the team leader. The new leader was voted by all team members. In cases where one team member was not completing tasks on time, they had to redistribute the roles among team members.

These responses reveal creativity, resourcefulness, flexibility, self-reliance and team management skills which they developed independently in response to project work requirements. Not only are these skills important for the twenty first century professionals, but they also prepare them to become citizens with democratic mindset. Stephen L. Carter (1998) defined civility as, 'the sum of the many sacrifices we are called to make for the sake of living together.' These sacrifices include being receptive to other citizens' ideas, ideals, or positions in order to respectfully hear what they have to say; respect for diversity; and tolerance of other citizens ideas and ideals. In our context, we can add to those values the ability to practice democratic life, particularly when students voted leaders in and out and when they resolved inner team conflicts by democratic means. The students also showed great ability to cope with frustration while working with non-collaborating or non-transparent partners; they demonstrated coping strategies enough to keep them motivated and engaged in cases where frustration almost made them give up on their errand. In fact, they reported doing more volunteering work after the CBL experience ended and they were able to guide others who wished to do it. Compared to other courses where no contact with the community was made, the 'sum of sacrifices' they made when dealing with others in the CBL courses not only increased their chances to become self-reliant learners but also it made them into better engaged citizens. In the non-CBL courses, the number of decisions taken by the students remains minimal since they are more often than not required to implement decisions made for them by their teachers.

Developing key critical thinking skills

One rationale that is often cited for using community-based learning is that this approach provides learners with plenty of opportunity to develop their critical thinking skills. Research on service learning has linked it to the development in learners of skills like 'interpersonal development and the ability to

work well with others, leadership and communication skills' (Eyler et al., 2001; see also Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001; Moely, McFarland, Miron, Mercer, & Illustre, 2002).

In addition to the key critical thinking skills described in the above sections which included decision making, project task the management, teamwork management and testing theoretical models as they relate to community problems, the student informants reported much self-learning effort done to complete project requirements.

Self-learning

Z immerman-Oster (2002) presents eight skills, which are important in identifying student characteristics in self-regulated learning. These skills include their ability to set goals for themselves; to adopt suitable strategies for attaining these goals; to monitor their own performance; to smooth out challenges from their learning environment to make it compatible with own goals; to managing their own time effectively; to reflect on and evaluate own methods; to show links between causes and effects; and finally, for the cycle to be complete, they should show ability to adapt future methods. When asked whether project completion required any additional skills outside assigned materials, all groups reported having to do self-learning of one type or another. The reported self-learning opportunities can be classified into four major types:

1. **Additional software applications**:
   a. Additional needs in particular applications necessary for the project- the English students searched, found, and trained on multi-media like flash and macro-media software to design electronic interactive materials for language learners.
   b. Project scope data entry in different formats. The GIS students reported designing Excel sheets to be integrated with GIS database thus making them accessible within available technology in the target organization.
2. **Knowledge related skills**
   c. Reflection on the tools (fieldwork data sheets) used to collect data- For the transportation students, the data sheet used to collect data on parking problems did not accommodate all parking patterns which required adding new parts to the data sheet in order to capture the new patterns.
   d. Missing data- like information on houses found empty; here the students needed to go back to the field to collect the missing data, thus spending more time than originally scheduled.
   e. The GIS students transferred technical requirements in database design which they learned by themselves in the CBL class to another advanced course where they distinguished themselves from other students who lacked these skills..
   f. Bridging one discipline with another related one. The urban planning students demonstrated ability to assess economic theories based on data they collected for planning project. In an economics class, they were able to discuss economic theories based on elements other than cost and finances like spatial distribution of development patterns in Nablus City as they relate to population income. They could practice data transfer from the project to theory in other courses.
3. **Higher order skills**:
   g. The experience made difference in the nature of questions they ask and level of debate. In non-cbl courses, questions were restricted to how and why. In the cbl class, one point can be an opportunity and a threat at the same time. They could assess the validity and value of the data they collected in the classroom discussions with the teacher.
   h. Writing multi-genre texts, including diagnostic parking space technical report (60-80 pages), brochures for anti-smoking campaigns, meeting minutes for women and child care organizations, user-friendly English language activities.
4. **Documentation** of material and work in various formats, such as videos, community partner meeting reports, progress reports, and field visit images.

Many of those skills are unintended outcomes but they come as a byproduct for engagement with real time projects. One outcome the researchers would classify as the most significant unintended outcome is that high level performance often develops into a learning style. The informants reported that in-class examples and cases they did in non-CBL classes became less challenging to them when compared with having to handle more complicated real experiences in the field. They became more motivated when they are challenged with real time projects.

Although the CBL class is much more demanding in time and effort than perhaps any other type of learning, the experience with the community organizations has clearly increased the learners' competitive advantage in the market in terms of skills or through their realization of how things work in real life situations.

Recommendations

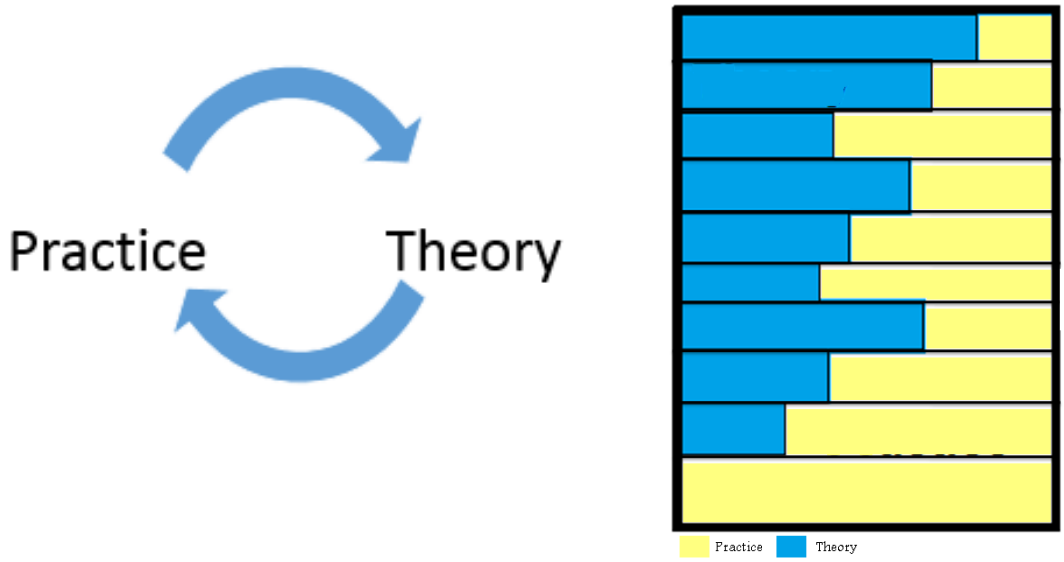
1. Teachers emphasize the higher level achievement resulting from additional effort that is almost always a byproduct for engaging in authentic community projects. Remind learners of the added value for their work with the community.
2. Teachers give enough class time to discuss work progress.A follow up report or team presentation on every project milestone will motivate students to think critically about what they are doing and learning to detect work delays and low quality performance in due time.

The (mis)match between theory and practice

When the participants were asked about how they evaluate the match between theory and practice in their CBL classes, they focused on two aspects: the theory-practice proportion and the strictly rigid flow of the theoretical models in the course syllabus. All participants reported that this field project experience was a new one for them, and that it was implemented through different models as introduced by the participants.

As to the theory-practice ratio, the students mentioned that in some classes the time was divided equally between theory and practice, each given 50% of the class time; in other classes, practice was given 70%; the highest percent for the practical part was 80%. This proportion gives a good indication about the theory-practice balance in the CBL courses. All ten CBL courses devote at least half course time to applied learning.

Regarding the alternation between theory and practice during implementation, the participants started this conversation by saying that they were taught using a model which sounded more like the traditional way of teaching. In general, as they stated, the theory part was usually given in a very well organized manner where the theory is given followed by an example or an in-class case study. They learn in class in a linear mode in which their knowledge increased as they progressed in the class materials. This, as one participant added, does not give the student the opportunity to experience real world practice in which theory and practice complement each other without a clear or coherent order. Some of the participants expressed the need to present the theory and practice in CBL classes in an iterative process. Students learn theory in class and apply it in the field, but they discover that their knowledge is incomplete, so they feel need for more theoretical grounding either from class materials or from other sources. This presentation of the way the students experienced the theory-practice balance better reflects the project vs knowledge cycles where the project cycle is much less ordered in flow than the strictly, yet artificially ordered, flow of books and assinged class materials. The project cycle is not as linear as the knowledge cycle. In practice, the ill-ordered project cycle can move much faster than the well-ordered rhythm of course presentation in the course syllabus. According to this model, the theory – practice loop can better be reflected as in figure (2):



(a) The theory-practice loop **(b) Theory-practice alteration**

Figure (2): Theory-practice model as proposed by the CBL students

Recommendations:

1. CBL teachers should show flexibility in the order of theory and practice during implementation where they can move forward and backward in theory presentation depending on project progress. The project flow should control the CBL class rhythm rather than the strictly ordered flow in the course syllabus.
2. In reality, the course progress happens in what the researchers would call the puzzle progress. Only at the end of the courses do all pieces fit together and the match between theory and practice could be achieved. The teachers should orient their students to this puzzle-like dynamic in the CBL experience.

The applicability of theoretical models

This part was meant to measure the applicability of theoretical models as they relate to community problems. The researchers wanted to find out whether the materials and models as taught in class did apply to real community problems, or whether there was a need to change or modify them in response to community needs, requirements, and/or resistance.

One student started the discussion on this topic by saying that 'to work with the community you have to be innovative'. The students who agreed with this statement said that innovation in real life is to bring new solutions which take into account community constraints, apply to the existing situation, and fit the community context. The innovative part in such solutions, as they stated, comes from the needed balance between several components including economic, social, political and cultural ones that the community partner cares about unlike the solutions suggested in the traditional courses.

As reported in the interviews, the project data was collected before the students acquired the knowledge necessary for it. The students recognized the gap between both sides. The missing knowledge parts motivated students to do further research. They went beyond the textbook when they went to the field and data collection. They had to refer to other references in order to be able to apply what we learned in practice.

The gap required students to be more creative. For example, one group was working on organizing training activities on children's rights. The group ended up working with visually and hearing impaired children where they had to figure out ways for communicating with these children. They had to be creative to reach to the target audience by using drawings and sing language translators.

The same group had to design and implement women right campaign with older women. Their audience showed resistance to the content of the class. They informed that 'The big gap between the theory and practice led us to reduce our expectation when we discovered that class models are basically irrelevant to these women, and we modified what theory we had to fit into this practical context.'

The awareness shown on the necessary imbalance between theory and practice is quite impressive. The students learned to become less reliant on books and more creative in finding practical solutions by tailoring theoretical models to fit community needs. More importantly, the response to this situation revealed their ability to adapt to new and emerging conditions- a skill which could not be acquired in any other type of learning experience that does not require direct contact with the community.

The rising level of confidence

Students expressed lower levels of satisfaction with community engagement at the beginning of the projects because they were working in less structured environments than they were accustomed to in the well-structured classroom learning settings. The contact persons in the target organizations were unhelpful, suspicious about the students' ability to serve, or unwilling to collaborate either because students will make them work more, or, more importantly, beacuse they were afraid that students will recognize the defects in their working systems, the thing that will expose their vulnerabilities. Another reason behind their dissatisfaction was that, as they started the project, they cared about task completion more than quality. However, as they got more engaged with the community, more specifically towards mid-semester, the students gained more experience in what they were doing; they became more confident as they gained more trust in their relation with the community partners. As described by the students, their confidence curve started increasing steadily as they reached mid-term and it reached its peak towards the term end.

Satisfaction with the final product

Scholarship on civic learning has connected students' engagement in service learning with their sense of being able to effect change in their community (Eyler and Giles, 1994; Gallini and Moely, 2003; Rockquemore and Schaffer, 2000).When it came to the quality of the final project output, CBL students gave different answers on their level of satisfaction with the course final products. Some students compared their project output with their fellows' work; others cited the satisfaction of the community partner and their feedback; still others based their satisfaction on the willingness of the partner organization to adopt the students' product. There was a common complaint about the dissatisfaction resulting from the fact that the community partner did not apply the schemes which were recommended in the student projects. All groups wanted to see their projects adopted as services in the target organizations.

Indeed, this passion to see the project come into reality is confirmed by the enthusiasm expressed by one group of students who said that they only realized the value of their GIS database project a few months after they finished the CBL class when another organization asked them to do the same database for another community partner. They did the service voluntarily which made them more and more satisfied with their CBL project.

One important observation here is that none of the participants expressed their level of satisfaction by referring to their grade either in the class or on the project itself. This result is rather promising in terms of learner motivation because unlike in traditional teaching and evaluation, the CBL experience became more significant to the students than the grade itself, i.e. the learning experience became less centered around the grade. The CBL engagement significantly boosted their motivation since they not only felt

ownership for their projects but they also were energized by the idea of delivering a service to needy organizations.

Recommendations

1. One way to overcome this feeling of dissatisfaction is for the teachers to base the CBL experience on an actual community need and to periodically check with the community on whether the emerging product is what they actually expect;
2. When they approach the community partner, teachers should consciously select ones who are small and middle size public and non-governmental organizations because they are more likely to have limited human and financial resources. And therefore they would welcome using the students as freely available taskforce in their organizations.

The gender element

Hurtado, 2009 and Zuniga, Williams, and Berger, 2005 have demonstrated that the more students are able to engage in diverse interactions on campus, inside and outside of the class, the more likely they are to confront notions of prejudice, be inclusive of views different from their own, and embrace social justice. In this last section, we wanted to find out whether the learners experienced any gender related prejudice while working with each other or in the community organizations. Surprisingly, the gender element did not present much challenge to the participants. They almost unanimously voted that it had no significant effect on the quality of the CBL engagement or the course product. This was in fact surprising because most of the students at ANU come from non-urban conservative population areas where schooling is gender segregated and where boys and girls often do not normally mix. It was anticipated that this cultural background would significantly impact project implementation where gender-mixed teams had to meet and to do field work which requires them to get in direct touch with their surrounding community in mixed teams.

The gender component was addressed as it related to three stakeholders in the community based learning. The students were asked whether gender made any difference to them when they dealt with: 1) the community partner representatives; 2) the general public and the beneficiaries in the partner organizations; and 3) other fellow students.

There were no significant differences when dealing with professionals. However, one important observation had to do with the level of formality in dealing with these professionals. A female student said that ‘when dealing with a male professional I was more serious than when I had to work with a female counterpart’. Another male student repeated the same observation by saying: ‘when I dealt with female engineers in the municipality I felt shy but by the end of the project I felt more comfortable’. The same student added: ‘the level of comfort (when dealing with a female professional) depends on the personality of the female engineer more than the personality of the student’. Apparently, the students felt a need to be more formal in their approach when dealing with members from a different sex.

There were more significant differences when dealing with the public in the field. After the students introduced some stories in which they faced gender-related-problems they talked about the lessons they learned and the skills they gained. One male student said: ‘when I knocked the door of one house, an elderly woman opened it; when she saw me she started shouting at me and said she will call the police. How can a man knock the house door with only women inside it’. The student added: ‘I was very confused and embarrassed and did not know what to do until my female team mate interfered to explain what we were doing.’ From this experience we learned, the student said, how important it is to have mixed groups when dealing with the general public. It completely depends on the social and cultural context of the community; a city is different from a village.

As to the effect of the gender on team work, both male and female participants agreed that the female groups are more reliable when it comes to work submission, meeting deadlines and commitment to working with the community partner. Mixed groups come in the second level in terms of commitment.

They were asked to vote whether they preferred to work in mixed or single gender groups. Female students preferred mixed groups for field work while male students preferred mixed groups because they are more motivating to work. Some male students, however, had an issue with having a female team leader and prefer not to be in a mixed group if the 'price', as they stated, is to be under a female supervision. Being in a mixed group, as a male student said, put us in real world situation in which male and female work together, negotiate each other, and sometimes confront each other.

Though the gender perception did not affect the final product, it did have impact on team composition and field work. In both cases as reported by participants, it was both convenient and efficient to have mixed groups.

Recommendations

1. It is important for the teacher to assign mixed group teams in order to avoid gender issues when working in the field, and to ensure commitment balance inside the team.
2. To avoid gender related conflicts among team members it advisable to set gender-neutral leadership criteria.

Conclusion

The study was designed to measure the impact of the CBL engagement on students learning experience, their citizenship skills, and their satisfaction with the implementation process and the course outcomes. The researchers promised to make available important data which can be put into practical use byCBL teachers and CBL program planners. Well, we come to the conclusion that, despite its many promises, the CBL programs are high risk ones, and we advise that careful planning and follow up measures should be put in place to guarantee success for this important program. Though the intentions of program planners to instill values like learning to serve and becoming responsible citizens are both valuable and admirable, a more pragmatic and well-informed approach to designing these programs is imperative as well.

On the positive end, the most important finding of the study is that the students developed impressive levels of awareness, enough for them to handle the various kinds of pressures which may result from working in less linear learning cycles from the ones they are used to in other courses where no contact with the community is required. The interviewed students were able to define several sources of frustration either in-class or in-field, and, in both cases, they were able to develop appropriate strategies to deal with those frustrations. It was also clear that the students developed key critical thinking skills which, as they stated, would not be acquired in traditional learning environments. They could very well define the needed more flexible flow in the theoretical and practical components and could assess the strengths and the weaknesses in the learning models they went through. On top of that, the level of confidence in the students' ability to work in real world environment was boosted either when dealing with decision makers in the partner organizations, the teachers, and the general public or when partners from the opposite sex.

Among the market skills they developed are managing team dynamics, collecting accurate data, and negotiating with reluctant community organizations. More significant, however, are the citizenship values they developed like democratic decision making inside the team; democratic changes in team leadership; conflict resolution mechanisms inside the teams; learning to cope with frustrations resulting from working with non-transparent or demotivated partners; and doing more related voluntary work beyond the CBL experience.

Though this may sound really promising, and in fact we are convinced it is, it remains to be said that the CBL designs require special attention because they introduce community organizations as one new key player into the learning process, which can be both a plus a minus for this approach. While the learning experience is really rich in terms of the learned skills and values, its success or failure will depend on the motivation, level of collaboration, and degree of engagement for the community partner. Therefore, in

such programs, especially when they are at their initial phases, the stakes are high that in these ill-defined and ill-structured learning environments the students will denounce the experience as a really frustrating one. Program planners should keep this in mind and should work towards reducing the stress levels which are likely to be experienced in such encounters.

The study revealed that it is important for both program planners and teachers to keep in mind three types of necessary balances during design and implementation of CBL courses. The balance between selection freedom and learner experience will help ensure timely project selection and a motivated community partner- two key elements for the success of any CBL class. When selecting the community partner, it is important to gauge learners experience in engaging with the community. The more experienced they are the faster and more accurate they will be in defining the partner's needs. The opposite is obviously true.

Centers for teaching and learning or the civic engagement centers can help achieve this necessary balance by conducting community need assessment surveys to provide teachers and students with project pools and partner contact person information. An online interactive community connector platform may prove to be one convenient tool which helps to constantly feed the pool with new projects and allows direct interaction between CBL program administrators and potential community partners.

The second balance between the linear theory cycle and the non-linear project cycle will require flexibility form the CBL teacher in moving up and down in the course material. Achieving this balance depends on three factors: (1) including the right theoretical materials in terms of quality and quantity; (2) flexibility in the flow of theoretical topics depending on project work progress; and (3) willingness to compromise the amount of theory to be covered in class while simultaneously encouraging self-learning instead.

Finally, it is important to establish a balance between giving the students the freedom to form their own groups and having them work in mixed gender groups. The first option will ensure smooth team dynamics with less inter-team conflict, while the second one will ensure smooth field experience and higher commitment towards the community partner.

References

Bringle, Robert G. and Hatcher, Julie A. 2000.'Institutionalization of service learning in higher education.'*Journal of Higher Education.* 71(3): 273-290.

Bringle, Robert and Hatcher Julie, 2009.'Innovative practices in service learning and curricular engagement.'*New Directions for Higher Education.* 147: 37-46.

Carter, Stephen L. 1998. *Civility: Manners, Morals, and Etiquette of Democracy*. New York: Basic Books.

Cress, C.M., Astin, H., Zimmerman-Oster K., and Burkhardt, J. 2001.''Developmental outcomes of college students' involvement in leadership activities.'*Journal of College Student Development*. 42 (1): 15–26.

Doherty I. 2011.'Evaluating the impact of educational technology professional development upon adoption of Web 2.0 tools in teaching. Australasian.'*Journal of Educational Technology*, 27 (3): 381-396.

Eyler, Janet S., Giles, Dwight E., Stenson, Christine M., Gray, Charlene J. 2001. 'At a glance: What we know about the effects of service learning on college students, faculty, institutions and communities, 1993-2000: Third Edition. Retrieved 10/12/10 from http://www.compact.org/wp content/uploads/resources/downloads/aag.pdf.

Holland, Barbara. 'Strategies for understanding the impact of civic learning and teaching.'*Civic Learning and Teaching*. Ed. Ashley Finley .2014.Bringing Theory to Practice, Washington, DC: 19-32.

Hurtado, Sylvia. 2009. 'Assessing higher education's advancement: Toward a new vision of society.' *Diversity & Democracy*. 12 (1): 1-3.

Giles, D.E., Jr., & Eyler, J. 1994. 'Theoretical roots of service learning in John Dewey: Toward a theory of service learning.'*Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 1 (1): 77-85.

Gallini, S., and Moely, B. 2003.'Service learning and engagement, academic challenge, and retention.'*Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 10 (1): 5–14.

Moely, B., McFarland, M., Miron, D., Mercer, S., and Ilustre, V. 2002. 'Changes in college students' attitudes and intentions for civic involvement as a function of service learning.'*Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*. 9(1): 18–26.

Rockquemore, K.A. and Schaffer, R.H. 2000. 'Toward a theory of engagement: A cognitive mapping of service learning experiences.'*Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 7(1): 14–25.

Zimmerman, Barry. 2002. 'Becoming a self-regulated learner: An overview.'*Theory Into Practice*. 41 (2): 64-70.

Zuniga, Ximena, Williams, Elizabeth, and Berger, Joseph. 2005. 'Action-oriented democratic outcomes: The impact of student involvement with campus diversity.'*Journal of College Student Development*. 46(6): 660-678.