

Service Learning – from Curriculum to Volunteerism

The students were enrolled in a course on how to create Macromedia Flash animations. The instructor felt this was a good opportunity to incorporate her love of service learning into the module. So the students developed their animations for community organisations, including the Alzheimer's Association and Youth Guidance in Singapore.



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Glossary of Acronyms

BA	School of Business and Accountancy
NP	Ngee Ann Polytechnic
CMP	Creating a Multimedia Presentation
VWO	Volunteer Welfare Organisation

LEARNING AND SERVING can go well side-by-side. That's what some final-year Business Studies (BS) students realized towards the end of a five-month project for an inter-disciplinary module, "Creating a Multimedia Presentation" (CMP).

CMP is a final year inter-disciplinary module where students learn the basic techniques of creating a multimedia movie as a tool for presentation and web design. As part of their project work, students help Community and Voluntary Welfare Organizations to produce multimedia movies using Macromedia Flash.

The organisations were delighted with the student input because the movies helped their publicity efforts and recruitment of volunteers.

Learning Experiences

The Service-Learning reflections in this module revealed a range of responses.

a. The importance of a good community partner

In this module, the students had to learn a skill and apply it to serve the chosen community within a tight time constraint. The students benefited most when community organisations took ownership and were willing to spend time to discuss the projects.

b. Targeted service

Many of the VWOs approached were delighted with the help offered to create a multimedia presentation. It was to them a "creative way to do community service". It was also meaningful for students who found a sense of fulfillment in being able to provide the expertise and at the same time learn more about the vision and mission of the VWO.

c. Interaction with the community

The project groups met with one representative from the VWO to discuss the plan and deliverables. It was evident that the groups who worked closely with the VWOs and took the trouble to visit and understand the scope and nature of the work benefited more in the area of learning.

d. Learning and Service as separate components

It was observed that for many students, their learning was focused on the technical aspect of the multimedia application, and quality of the product, despite the lecturers' emphasis on the needs of the community.

“
... this project actually provided us with a win-win situation whereby we learnt both about Macromedia Flash and Alzheimer's disease. We are very happy to have learnt new things and also to have contributed our flash movie to the Alzheimer's Disease Association.”



Students Sherlyn Lim, Ho Liming, Gracina Lim, Raine Toh (from Reflections in their final report CMP Jul - Nov 2004)

Service Learning

The Service Learning Model used in this course is a **Problem Based Service Learning Module**¹. According to this model, students (or teams of students) relate to the community much as “consultants” working for a “client.” Students work with community members to understand a particular community problem or need. This model presumes that the students will have some knowledge that they can draw upon to make recommendations to the community or develop a solution to the problem, in this case a Macromedia Flash presentation.

Project groups were required to work with Volunteer Welfare Organisations. The students offered to produce a multimedia movie and were required to negotiate realistic deliverables. This process enabled them to develop negotiation skills with customers and to understand the importance of delivering to promise.

“

This module requires "heart-ware" along with technical expertise. It is a Service-learning module, and we encourage you to author your Flash movies with your hearts as you discover about the work and outreach of the VWOs. ”

Joyce Tang, Module Leader
(from instructions to her students)

What is Service-Learning?

Service Learning is one type of experiential learning. The primary difference lies in the focus of the reciprocal benefit where meaningful service is rendered to the community (helping others) and meaningful learning is experienced by the student (developing self).³

Service Learning uses structures such as:

- ❖ pre-service preparation courses (to learn relevant skills),
- ❖ field seminars,
- ❖ reflection workshops,
- ❖ critical incident journals and
- ❖ other means to encourage and support student learning from experience (Stanton, Giles, Cruz, p5).²

Service Learning is usually applied in a curriculum with a targeted service, where students have learnt or are in the process of learning a specific skill, and at the same time applying that skill as a service to a community with such a specific need. ¹

What makes Service Learning a good approach to Teaching & Learning?

Confucius said:

“Tell me and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember.
Involve me, and I will understand”

Service Learning projects allow youth to share in the responsibility for their own learning, to make connections between the service they are engaged in and the learning to be gained from it.

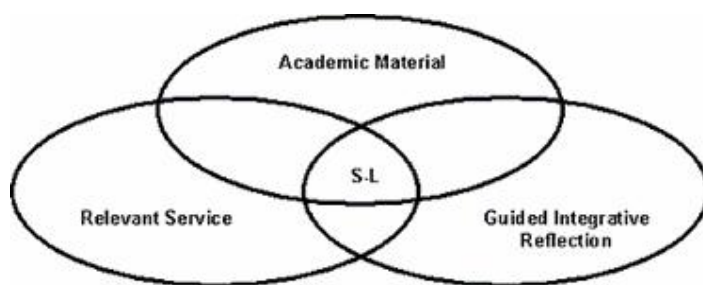
When students put into action their acquired knowledge to service activities in the community, the relevance and application value of the knowledge becomes more evident. The hands-on application of curriculum in a real life situation provides a clearer and more complex perspective regarding the knowledge. Hence, reinforcing the learning of curriculum content and allowing the youths to practice critical thinking and problem solving. ¹

Some of the participating organizations in this project:

*Prisons InCare Services
Singapore
Youth Guidance Singapore
Grace Home
Touch Community Services
Salvation Army
High Point Community Services
En Community Services
Dover Park Hospice
Bedok Multiservice Centre*

Other inherent benefits:

- ❖ Develop Personal and Interpersonal Skills
- ❖ Foster Civic Responsibility and Citizenship
- ❖ Develop Youth Leadership
- ❖ Service-learning promotes exploration of various career pathways



Components of Service Learning – North Carolina State University⁴

Appendix 1 contains details of the course planning and schedule.

Student Feedback from CMP Survey

The majority of students felt that the service learning component made the module more meaningful, relevant, satisfying and exciting.

Appendix 2 contains more detailed student feedback in tabular form.

What the Students Learned

The students reported:

“I have learnt that there are many ways someone can lend a helping hand to a charitable organization. In the past, I felt that only by donating money and being a volunteer helped the charity. After the service learning, I came to know that by contributing a skill I can also provide the charitable organization with a great help.”

“The reason for working so hard on a project was not only for good grades in a module, but to assess the needs of the care centre. I realized they had their own constraints and would really appreciate our help in creating a Flash for them. The Flash [animation] includes their pictures taken during an outing, also the daily activities. It would help them to recollect good memories as they grow. The conclusion was, everything I done was for a good cause and will be helpful, thus I will put in my best in completing my piece of work.”

“I find that it is an interesting concept, to be able to use our knowledge and serve others. It opens students' eyes to some of the needs of the outside world. Knowing that what we learn can benefit these needs proved to be a humbling experience indeed. It has taught me to be more aware of the needs of others, particularly the less fortunate and the aged. It made me feel good doing social work and in future I would be more ready to do volunteer work.”

“

It was good to have people from the outside world to make comments and grade us.

In addition, with the idea in mind that the submission of the end product may be of use for the organisation, it acts as motivation for us to do better. It increases our sense of responsibility.”

- Student feedback

“What I have learnt through Service-Learning:

- ❖ It deepened my understanding and appreciation of social and community needs.
- ❖ There is always someone that needs help and you can help the person in whatever you can even applying skills that you have learnt.
- ❖ Independence and responsibility to help others while helping ourself.
- ❖ The needs of the organisation and their target audience for example: Bedok Multiservice Centre and their target audience.
- ❖ How to communicate with the VWOs effectively and efficiency so that we are able to understand their needs and if can help in some way to improve the image and service of the VWOs.
- ❖ Start with a positive attitude and with a sincere heart to help them. Therefore come up with a sincere flash movie to capture the heart of the audience. At the same time, learn more about the organisation and their functions.

“After the introduction by Ms Veronica Ong and Mr Frank Chan, we had an idea of what the Salvation Army is, why there is a need for that, and how it benefits the society. In the past, we never heard about Salvation Army, this is the first time; therefore it creates our interests to get to know more.”

Feedback from the Volunteer Welfare Organisations

The VWOs who participated in the CMP module have given very encouraging feedback from the experience. Below are excerpts from their feedback.

“The team members are highly perceptive. A few of them will make good social workers. The visuals they created were excellent and captured the spirit of the organization in a big way. I personally feel this is one of the more effective ways in developing an active and social mindset in students. It is a gentle introduction to the harsher aspects of life.”

Wang Kim Meng, Deputy Executive Director, Youth Guidance.

“The team’s presentation was well thought-out and inspiring. They have understood the mental model of the user by adding games and reflections. It is very interactive. They could sympathise with the prisoners who will be using the product.”

Kesava Kumaran G, Counsellor, Cluster Management Office.

“The students visited the centre twice and corresponded with the centre supervisor 2-3 times via email to develop the storyline. The team showed great interest in the centre, the organization, its services and its aims. They were very thorough and systematic in their approach to the project.”

Audrey Choo, Group Administrator, Care Corner Singapore.

“

There are a lot of VWOs in Singapore and if I didn't choose this module, I will never know that such a VWO exist. Thus it reminds us that there are still a lot of people out there who are in need rather than just National Kidney Foundation or Ren Ci.”

- Student feedback

References

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Appendix 1

Course Journey

Pre-course preparation

- ❖ Module Leader sources for VWO with multimedia needs.
- ❖ Discussions with officers on possible areas students could provide multimedia development service
- ❖ VWOs' and Teaching Staff come to an agreement on possible areas for students to provide service

Assessment

The Assessment was especially tailored to cater to the Service-Learning pedagogy. The project was a major component of the assessment, and feedback from the community was included as part of the assessment for the project. An officer from the community was present to view and feedback on the project during the final presentation.

Schedule

Weeks	Activity
Weeks 1-4 Learning Macromedia Flash	- Course Introduction - Students learn important features of Macromedia Flash through hands on class activities
Week 5 & 6	- Hands on Quiz - Break
Week 7 VWO visit	Student groups meet VWO officers 1. Introduction of VWO, mission, objectives, projects 2. Introducing the assignment 3. Open discussion and clarifications 4. Confirming a date for visit to VWO
Week 7 - 12 Visit to Organization & Needs Assessment, & development	1. Groups work on the organization's needs by visiting organization, where an on-site introduction will be given. Students take the necessary photos, videos, interviews etc during this visit. 2. Groups complete Needs Assessment form agreed upon by the students and the officer. 3. Groups work on developing the Flash product and are encouraged to keep in touch with VWO officers to ensure final product meets the needs of the organization
Week 12 Final Presentation & VWO debrief & Reflective Journalling	1. Students present their final projects to the VWO & tutor, and are graded based on feedback from the VWO's. 2. VWO officer debriefs students on their presentations and encourages them to visit the organization and volunteer in other ways. 3. Students provide officers with copies of their presentation 4. Students submit final report with a reflective journal

Appendix 2 – Student Feedback

In July 2003, there were 92 participants, Jan 2004 had 87 participants and in Jun 2004, 87 participants.

The requirement to find a customer with a genuine need that we can help for our project has made this module more meaningful, relevant and exciting.

Semester	Jul 2003	Jan 2004	Jun 2004
Strongly Agree + Agree	76%	88%	87%

From working with the customer in this project, we have learnt more about their organisation/work. This experience encourages us to consider serving others in the future.

Semester	Jul 2003	Jan 2004	Jun 2004
Strongly Agree + Agree	84%	90%	87%

Given the opportunity, I would like to apply what I have learnt to help another community with such a need.

Semester	Jul 2003	Jan 2004	Jun 2004
Strongly Agree + Agree	- not asked -	78%	86%

There is a strong sense of satisfaction upon completion of this module.

Semester	Jul 2003	Jan 2004	Jun 2004
Strongly Agree + Agree	82%	91%	91%