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**ROOSEVELT UNIVERSITY**

## The Environment and Learning Experience

Acknowledging the influence of instructors who "appear to be human and caring," the receptive environment established within the Academic Success Center (ASC) has been guided by the principle that students seek out those who make them feel comfortable and avoid those who cause them to feel uncomfortable, or who provide unrewarding experience. It has also sought to recognize that the quality of communication is greatly influenced by prior expectations, as well as that the environment within which an interaction takes place will greatly influence its outcome. Taking these factors into account, the Academic Success Center has been physically arranged to create a comfortable/casual space (including a small conversation area with two chairs and a coffee table, as well as several paintings from the University's art collection) within which students can study, receive small group and individualized instruction, page through a magazine or newspaper, and have computer access. Additionally, the ASC is designed to be a place where students can talk out their ideas, receive non-judgmental study skills advice, and obtain the type of extended-time remediation that is not possible within a traditional classroom setting, both from professional staff and content tutors (who include honors undergraduate students, graduate students, adjunct faculty and other specialized instructors), as well as from currently enrolled peer mentors.

The advantage of this type of approach is that the specific needs of particular students can systematically be met. Chronic concerns that cannot adequately be resolved within a group setting, such as specific mathematical functions, particular editing applications, and issues related to reading comprehension can be successfully addressed.

*Classroom Practices*

With respect to faculty applications of these principles, the classroom, similarly, is an environment that can be used to facilitate a systematic approach to comprehension. Such routine practices as beginning on time, using the first several minutes of a class session to return and collect assignments, conducting a student "recall" session regarding the previous session, and closing the door following the completion of that beginning regimen can be extremely helpful with respect to connecting the experience of one class to another, orienting students who may have missed a class, discouraging late arrivals, and eliminating external, hallway distractions.

Further suggestions for instructions include:

- Requiring notes to be taken during each session, like minutes at a meeting guided by "agenda items," the amplification of which can be developed through lecture/discussion, resulting in "generative note-taking" augmented by background information for references;

- Dividing the class experience into a series of purposeful, twenty minute activities (to accommodate contemporary student concentration spans);

- Providing assignments in writing, with attention to the process of their completion; and

- Providing a "style sheet" that is specific to the writing

requirements/expectations for a given discipline/course stating specifically that writing should be clear, well organized and exhibit the use of the standard conventions of written English.

In the effort to make increased support available for the growing numbers of traditional-age students enrolled at Roosevelt University, the Academic Success Center plans to continue to strengthen its affiliations with both instructors and students by working closely with its faculty advising board and by actively seeking to establish and maintain interactive relationships with currently enrolled students. Finally, it is believed that, through providing a comfortably structured, non-judgmental, self-contained classroom environment, as well as with the faculty and student resources that can be made available by the staff of the Academic Success Center, the gap between expectations and reality, "between the idea and the reality ... between the conception and the creation," between Sam Cooke's "Don't know much about ..." and Kurt Cobain's "Here we are now, entertain us," can and will be productively "over come."

# Lessons Learned from an Ambitious Service-Learning Class

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Psychology of Close Relationships (PSYC 384) was a service-learning class that attempted to serve multiple goals. Our overarching goals were: (1) addressing the problem of risky behavior in adolescents and undergraduates, (2) helping undergraduates understand the life experience of low income adolescents, and (3) providing undergraduates with a service experience that would encourage future service and volunteering. In this article, we describe our success with Goals 2 and 3. These were ambitious goals, and if we were to run the class again, we would use what we learned to increase our chances of reaching these goals, and to reduce the labor intensiveness of the course.

As an overview, Psychology 384 was funded by a McCormick Tribune Service-Learning Grant awarded to the first author. It was intended as an academic and experiential service-learning course, in which undergraduates learned relationship skills, then taught the same skills to at-risk adolescents as a service to a local community agency, the Boys and Girls Club of Chicago (BGCC). Both the course and running the groups would teach the undergraduates key relationship skills as well as instruct them in how to teach these skills to teens in groups. The groups were comprised of male and female teen participants currently involved in the BGCC.

So that others may learn from our successes and challenges,

we provide the following about the process of implementing the course. First, we describe our partnership with a willing community service organization. Next, we describe the design of an undergraduate psychology course that included a service-learning component. Further, we explain the logistical challenges we encountered along the way. Next, we provide a summary of themes that emerged in the journal reflections from the undergraduates. Last, we cover some of the lessons we learned from this long process.

## Problem and Approach: Relationship Skills

There is increased interest in providing both adolescents and young adults with "pre-marital" or relationship skills education to address the challenges that occur in later, long-term relationships. One format for these programs occurs at the college level, with students receiving course credit. We were interested in addressing relationship skills with a community partner, who would find this content meaningful to its target audience.

Approaching a community partner interested in serving adolescents could take several forms. One could: (1) inquire what an agency's most pressing service need was, (2) develop an idea in partnership with the agency, or (3) come to the agency with a specific idea that appeared consistent with the mission. We utilized the last strategy in which we approached the BGCC with a relationship skills intervention that we could offer to their participating adolescents. This partnership appeared beneficial for both groups in that the BGCC saw a need for such an intervention and appreciated that we would provide the staff (undergraduate students) and the materials needed to run the program.

However, partnering with an outside agency for a service-learning course is not without its challenges. Approval occurred at multiple levels over a lengthy period of time. Initially, the executive staff of the BGCC approved the idea, followed by the central office BGCC youth coordinator, followed by each club's coordinator, followed by each club's youth programs director, and ended with the "buy-in" from the adolescents themselves who came to the groups.

## Design of the Course

The course was designed to increase students' knowledge about marriage and intimate relationships, while also improving their abilities to navigate these relationships. Students did readings on close relationships and marriages as well as on group facilitation and adolescents. We utilized a pre-existing curriculum called "Love U2: Relationship Smarts Plus (LU2)," produced by The Dibble Institute (Pearson, 2007). As the service-learning component, the students provided a program based on the Love U2 curriculum. The program was offered for seven weeks and included identifying healthy relationships, values clarification, dating violence prevention and conflict resolution skills. Graduate students served as teaching assistants/coaches who helped the undergraduates with their service.

## Execution of the Program: Logistical Challenges

The logistical challenges we encountered were the product of running groups in four different clubs, using a material-heavy curriculum and attempting to collect research data all at the same time. Because of high interest among undergraduates, we ran groups across four different clubs of the BGCC, which increased the complexity of the program dramatically. Also, the LU2 curriculum, while appropriate and evidence based, required the creation of many materials, including flash cards, game pieces, question prompts, Play-Doh, handouts, etc. Needing all these materials across all clubs complicated the program further. Lastly, we attempted to collect questionnaire data from the adolescents before and after the program. This required additional paperwork, time and coordination from the undergraduates and adolescents. Consider all of the above, with different groups starting on different days of the week, on different weeks during the semester, and with varying numbers of adolescents, and the complications multiply exponentially!

## Journal Reflections

Despite these complications, we appeared to reach our goals of increased understanding and appreciation of service among the undergraduates. After each session at the BGCC, the undergraduates composed journal entries based on reflective questions assigned in class. The questions were:

1. What did the teens in the group teach YOU about relationships and how are your experiences as an adolescent the same or different, and why?

2. What has been most challenging so far about running the groups and what has been most rewarding so far about running the groups?

3. What biases or misconceptions have you had about teens and their relationships, and how have these biases or misperceptions been altered?

4. Write a journal entry addressing your reaction to leading a group with other facilitators. What are the advantages and what are the disadvantages of facilitating with others?

5. Write a journal entry describing what it has been like to work with your Boys & Girls Club. How has the experience changed your thoughts about working in the community? What have you learned about non-profit service agencies (like BGCC)?

6. Write a journal entry on how you might modify the Love U2 curriculum. What topics or activities might you add or delete? What do you think your group needs that the curriculum did not provide?

7. Write a journal entry regarding the MOST IMPORTANT things you learned during your service experience at the clubs. What would you want to share with students who might take PSYC 384 in the future?

We read all the journal entries that varied in number based on number of sessions facilitated at the BGCC and coded for themes. The themes that emerged were: basic content summaries of the lessons, misconceptions about teens that were changed, advantages and disadvantages of group co-facilitation, community service/volunteering, reactions to the LU2 curriculum, and how they, as undergraduates, changed from the experience.

Below we present some representative quotes from the undergraduates' journals on several themes. For example, while recounting her experience with community service and volunteering, one junior said,

> "I found that going home after working with these teens is extremely rewarding. I feel like I'm meeting people I would never meet with my lifestyle and it's exciting to hear what the kids have to say. I even talk about it to my co-workers and I love the reaction they give me when I say I volunteer. It's usually along the lines of, 'I could never do something like that' or they laugh at me because it is so out of my character. Especially with my crazy busy schedule, I feel like I would make time to do more volunteer work after this is over."

There were both positive and negative reactions to the structured curriculum; the students liked some parts and pointed out flaws. A senior had both positive and negative things to report. She said,

> "One of the weaknesses that I have noticed throughout the LU2 curriculum is that there are parts where they are trying to display too many facts and statistics at once. It's kind of a waste to try to stuff so much information in one lesson because the teens have a hard time concentrating and retaining all the information. Some of the lessons become boring for the teens and their minds wander off."

She also reported,

> "I also noticed that kids were more prone to remembering the catchy phrases that the LU2 curriculum had employed ...This is something I think the LU2 program does well. They come up with easily worded names for the techniques and lessons."

One prominent theme was about change from the experience. In recounting her experience, a non-traditional age student said,

> "I think that I took on the stereotypical viewpoint about them [the adolescents]. I thought that they wouldn't be engaged and that they wouldn't care about what we the facilitators were speaking about. Luckily, today I get to admit that I was very wrong about them. My viewpoint couldn't have been further from the truth. I found myself learning from the teens and some of their comments made me do some self reflecting."

## Lessons Learned

After our own reflection on this course, we have discovered a number of things that if we were to repeat, we would change to improve the process for everyone involved. We discovered that when finding a community partner, it was helpful to network and be flexible, but plan for various contingencies far in advance. In addition, it was crucial to have the students visit the site in advance of the actual service so they could familiarize themselves with the site and the administrators, and so the adolescents would recognize them when they returned for the sessions.

Some things we could not change along the way, but would improve if we were to do this again, would be to warn the students about the time commitment in advance (at registration) and to get help. It would have been much easier to have additional teaching assistants to help, or request a faculty course reduction for the semester, as the time commitment was much more than a regular course. Also, we learned the value of downsizing. Fewer undergraduates working with fewer adolescents would have significantly reduced the complexity of the course. We also found that a more flexible curriculum, or not rigid adherence to the existing one, would have been easier for all involved. Lastly, providing food for the adolescent groups and incentivizing them in other ways was invaluable.

# Kozol's Kids as Adult Learners: Implementing 'Wraparound' Instructional Practices

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Borrowing from both health and social services models, we, as faculty in practitioner programs can move beyond the explicit curriculum of our programs and incorporate "wraparound" services for our students. That is, we can emphasize and magnify the natural strengths and informal supports of our students. We can do so by implementing the three guiding principles of what I term a "Model of Inclusive Education for Professional Development (IEPD)": competency, connections and caring. This article briefly describes these principles and covers explicit methods and techniques used to foster professional development in students, eschewing "skill and drill" and stimulating students' self-efficacy and potential. Specifically, it addresses how to provide students with the foundational skills they need to succeed in school and beyond, and how to avoid predatory admissions in higher education.
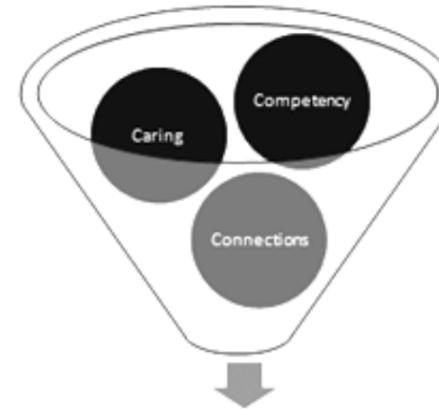


**A Model of Inclusive Education for Professional Development**

## Competency

Much has been written about fostering competency in professional education (Houle, 1980; Schön, 1987). Much has also been written about providing educational scaffolding for learners in those settings (Bonk, Lee, Kim, & Lin, 2009). Within the IEPD model, the fostering of competency is extended beyond past practices by addressing an additional focus — foundational skills — and a strong focus on learner self-assessment.

*Foundational Skills*

What to include under foundational skills will necessarily depend upon the profession or area being studied. For example, in the Training and Development Program, I offer the following suggestions for helping students improve their foundational skills.

| Type of Foundational Skill | Strategy/Technique |
|---|---|
| Writing | Writing for success: Choose key areas on which to focus. Provide a few minutes of direct instruction at the start of each class session. I covered one topic per class; topics were chosen from the text *The Elements of Technical Writing* by Blake and Bly. |
| Reading | Inspectional reading: Help students understand the structure of any texts in use and how to make the most of examples, charts, etc. provided in the text. Give specific exercises that ask students to demonstrate an understanding of the text organization and examples.[1] |
| Organization and Focus | Course packs: During the first session, distribute packets that contain the syllabus, feedback sheets, templates for and examples of assignments.<br><br>Success paths: Create a graphic organizer of how the course works; that is, showing what work is done to prepare for class, what work is done in class, and what work is done following class. Discuss this during the first session.<br><br>Course web sites: Keep the digital versions of the syllabus, templates and so forth there. Also, create forums for students to ask questions and to continue conversations between class sessions. |

[1] Inspectional Reading: The concept of inspectional reading was introduced by Adler and Van Doren.