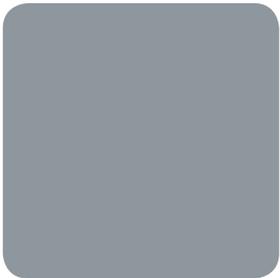




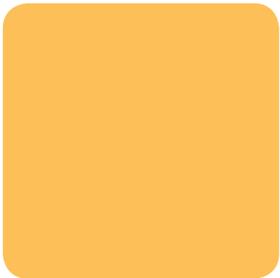
Incorporating Community-Engaged Education into Courses:



A Guidebook



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Section 1 – Introduction and Definitions

Community-engaged education is a pedagogical approach that sees our communities as integral to education. Community-engaged education has been a component of many university disciplines for many years but recently there has been a growing interest in developing experiential components for all disciplines. In particular, there has been an increased recognition that universities play an important role in their communities and those communities provide rich opportunities for student learning.

Community-engaged education is an aspect of experiential education. Experiential education is a pedagogical approach which brings concrete learning together with abstract learning to encourage a deeper engagement by the student with the subject matter. Community-engaged education is experiential education that includes and incorporates communities and can consist of experiences both inside and outside the classroom, ranging from guest speakers to archeological digs.

This manual is intended to provide faculty members with the tools they need to develop or refine community-engaged elements in their courses. While experiential and community-engaged education are being taken up in universities across the country, McMaster, as always, will develop its own unique approach. This manual is intended to help with this process.

Definitions

The Community Engagement Task Force, created by Patrick Deane as an aspect of Forward with Integrity, has defined Community Engagement as follows:

“McMaster University is a committed member of the greater Hamilton community and broader society and recognizes that true excellence can only be achieved when we are working together with our community partners. We are mindful of the interconnectedness of our globalized world. We value community and public engagement that is mutually beneficial, supports our academic, research, service, and civic outreach missions, and collaboratively leads to meaningful outcomes and sustained actions and relationships. Regardless of the discipline, graduates of McMaster will be citizens engaged in multiple communities (academic, geographic, economic, global) in multiple ways, but we recognize that our relationships within the community we call home are paramount to supporting the vitality and well-being of the greater Hamilton area” (McMaster University Task Force Report on Community Engagement as cited in Mendrygal et al., 2012).

In incorporating this definition into our pedagogy it might be useful to consider the following definitions.

Experiential Education: “Experiential education refers to learning activities that engage the learner directly in the phenomena being studied” (Kendall et al., 1986). It refers to any form of education that connects theory taught in the classroom with “real world” practice.

Service Learning: Service learning is a form of community-engaged education which refers to the use of community service as an integral part of the pedagogical process. Such service is used to enhance student learning with direct ties to academic content (Chupp & Joseph, 2010).

Community: A definition of community should recognize that although we talk about community as a singular entity it is actually many communities. It may be the university community, the neighbourhoods just outside of the university, the city we are located in, or our provincial, national or global communities. It is important to consider which communities or even which aspects of a community you will engage in your pedagogy.

Community-Engaged Education: A type of pedagogy that incorporates the understandings, needs and views of communities into its practice. This usually occurs through the inclusion of community-engaged education in the curriculum and sometimes, more specifically, service-learning.

Section 2 – Why Choose Community-Engaged Education?

McMaster has an excellent reputation for teaching, particularly teaching innovation. Our faculty are always looking for ways to improve the educational experience of students. Community-engaged education is an excellent example of this, providing a means to invigorate your classes, with new and refreshing experiences for your students and you. This section outlines the many benefits that community-engaged education has for students, faculty and communities.

Students

As professional life-long learners and teachers we understand the practical application and relevance of even the most esoteric knowledge; however, this understanding is somewhat elusive for most of the students we teach. Community-engaged education is an effective way to assist students with making the connection between theory, practice and relevance to the 'real world'. Including community-engaged education in your courses will benefit your students in the following ways:

Increased student engagement with course material specifically and their academic work generally (Fallini & Moely, 2003) – Students find community-engaged education more enjoyable and engaging than traditional lecture formats. It assists them in identifying the relevance of what they are learning and provides another avenue for the exploration and integration of material.

Improved academic performance (Astin & Sax, 1998; Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000) – It makes sense that students who are more engaged with learning will have improved academic performance. This is particularly true for marginalized students who may be first generation, from diverse communities or who learn differently. Strage (2000) found increased course comprehension among students who engaged in experiential activities.

Increased self-efficacy (Bringle & Steinberg, 2010) – The experience of making positive change, however small, develops students' desire to take action and their belief that such action will produce desired results.

Awareness of contemporary issues (Astin & Sax, 1998) – Students are exposed to the many issues facing our communities. Students can be somewhat disconnected from the realities of everyday life. Community-engaged education connects them with real world issues and encourages them to investigate causes as well as solutions.

Increased interest in and likelihood to become engaged in communities (Knapp et al., 2010) – Students who are aware of their community and the issues it faces become interested and engaged in their community in a variety of ways. Quality opportunities that combine experience and classroom education have been shown to increase notions of social responsibility such as helping others in need (Markus, Howard, & King, 1993), a heightened concern for civic responsibilities (Myers-Lipton, 1998), as well as the likelihood to continue civic engagement beyond graduation (Astin, Sax & Avalos, 1999; Knapp, Fisher, & Levesque-Bristol, 2010).

Long-term commitment to social justice issues (Roschelle et al., 2000) – Students who engage with their communities often become aware of and engaged in social issues, and once engaged, they tend to maintain the commitment to positive social change.

Increased sensitivity and capacity to manage diversity (Astin et al., 1999) – The exposure to different groups of people, often people that they might not otherwise connect with, assists students in developing a greater sensitivity to issues of diversity and an increased capacity to manage issues of diversity positively.

A broader awareness the surrounding communities – Students get to know their communities better. Students tend to stay in familiar places. At McMaster this means that students stay on campus or sometimes venture into the Westdale neighbourhood. Experiences that draw them into the many other communities outside of campus provide them with a broader view of the opportunities around them.

Communities

We are all part of communities and as the Community Engagement Task Force states, it is important for us to ensure, that as part of the university, we are helping to build and support our communities. In this light, it is important for us to understand how community-engaged education impacts the communities we access as learning spaces.

Improved citizens with a greater connection to communities (Knapp et al., 2010) – As mentioned above, community-engaged education creates more engaged and committed citizens and these types of citizens help communities to thrive.

Prestige and access to resources through connection to the university (Kellog, 2002) – Universities often have resources that are not available to community organizations. These include specialized knowledge, trained researchers and grant dollars. A connection to a university can provide a group or organization with legitimacy and status.

Students can provide an extra resource for the agency (Vernon & Ward, 1999) – Good students have energy and enthusiasm to spare. They can also bring skills, knowledge, creativity and vision. The ability of students to contribute to communities is dependent on how well they are prepared and the amount of time they have to contribute.

Increased awareness of an organization's service provision (Jones & Hill, 2001) – When students are engaged with a group or organization in communities they become knowledgeable about the mandate, mission and services of that group or organization. This is a great form of advertising and can sometimes lead to ongoing volunteer and even donor relationships.

Potential pool of job applicants – Students who become engaged with an organization and spend time there can become potential employees for an organization.

Faculty

We know that faculty are committed to their students and their communities, so the positives mentioned above are encouragement for faculty to include community-engaged education in their courses. In addition, there are also direct benefits for faculty in incorporating community-engaged education into their courses.

Greater knowledge of communities and improved community connections (Huo, 2010) – Faculty also felt that course work that engaged them and their students with communities resulted in better connections with those communities and increased knowledge of them. This often positively impacted research ideas and opportunities.

Positive impact on teaching style and ability (Huo, 2010) – Faculty found that community-engaged education challenged them and gave them new pedagogical tools. They felt this improved their teaching.

Closer relationships with students and increased enjoyment of teaching (Pribenow, 2005) – Faculty who incorporate community-engaged education in their courses tend to find an increase in their enjoyment of teaching and an opportunity to form closer relationships with their students.

Improved results from students (Abes et al., 2002) – As mentioned above, students did better and were more engaged in their course material resulting in an enhanced teaching experience.

University

It is important to have infrastructure in place to support community-engaged education. Of course, happier students and more fulfilled faculty are important positives that result from implementing community-engaged education but there are direct benefits for the university as a whole.

Increase in positive perceptions, and knowledge of the university (Schmidt & Robby, 2002) – Canadian universities rely on the support of their communities. Engagement in community-engaged education results in greater connection to and better perceptions of the university as a whole.

Increased retention of students (Gallini & Moley, 2003) – Universities are also in competition for students and community-engaged education increases the retention of students and their commitment to their university.

Questions You May Have Before You Decide to Use Community-Engaged Education

As you can see there are many good reasons to support community-engaged education but anything worth doing will also present challenges.

I've never used experiential learning before. How do I start?

It is a challenge to learn a new pedagogy and how to incorporate it into your courses. The next sections will give you tips about each step of the planning process.

How do I decide upon and design activities?

The next section is a guide to developing community-engaged education for your courses. Suggestions for activities are included in this manual and there are many available on the internet as well. Attending the Community of Practice for Community Engagement will connect you with other faculty who are engaged in community-engaged education and there is an Idea Exchange¹ held every year in the Spring. You can also consult with the Centre for Leadership in Learning.

¹ The Idea Exchange is an event held every year to provide the McMaster community with an opportunity to share their experiences with community-engaged education. The event includes workshops and opportunities to network, ask questions and discuss topics of interest.

How do I assess students?

This is the issue that faculty struggle with the most. The important thing is to focus on assessing students on what they learn from the experience rather than the experience itself. In effect, you treat their experiences in community-engaged education as you would a text or lectures. This allows faculty to use traditional methods of assessment such as essays but as you will see in Section 5 it also allows for some interesting and innovative ways to assess students' learning.

How do I connect with partners in our communities?

Each faculty has staff who connect to communities in various ways and are available to assist faculty. In addition, the Student Success Centre has many longstanding relationships with partners in our communities who are looking for connections with the university and our students. You are likely to also have your own connections within your communities. Section 6 discusses how to establish and maintain good community partnerships.

Will it be a lot more work?

This really depends on the type of community-engaged education you use and how you modify your course to include it. In most cases, community-engaged education will not create more work but it might change or shift your work.

Section 3 – Developing a Community-Engaged Education Course

Some disciplines lend themselves easily to community-engaged education, and have included such components in their classes for years, eg., engineering, social work and nursing, but all disciplines have courses that have applicability to ‘real life’ and even disciplines that already include community-engaged education could expand its use. Departments may want to discuss which courses they would like to have an experiential component or if they wish to have a capstone course that is largely experiential. There are many different ways to give students a community-engaged, “hands-on” experience in their education.

Learning Objectives

As an instructor you begin by developing the learning objectives for your course. What do you want your students to know and understand when they have completed it?

Community-engaged education will not fit every course or every learning objective but there are particular things that community engaged-education does very well. We’ve provided the following questions to help you decide if community engaged education is a fit for you and your course.

Are there particular course objectives that will be difficult to achieve with lecture and reading alone?

Do your course objectives include wanting students to understand the applicability of a body of knowledge?

Is it important for the students to understand the course material in relation to themselves or their own lives?

Do you want the students to experience or develop skills in self-reflection or self-directed learning?

If you have decided to include community-engaged education in your course, then your next decision is what kind of community-engaged education to include.

Types of Community-Engaged Education Activities

Some learning objectives are best met by in-class activities while others are met by in-community activities or a combination of both.

In-Class Activities

In-class activities tend to be smaller, limited to one class and often tied to a particular concept or body of knowledge. Projects are larger, tend to take several classes, perhaps even the entire length of the course and are linked more generally to the entirety of the course material.

Case studies are an excellent way to bring the 'real world' into the class room. Case studies can be real or developed. They can provide students with an opportunity to apply concepts to a problem or situation. Some examples of case studies include:

- biology students examining the effect of climate change on the production of pollen and allergy season from the U.S. National Centre for Case Study Teaching in Science

http://sciencecases.lib.buffalo.edu/cs/collection/detail.asp?case_id=465&id=465.

- sociology students examining a problem with bullying in a rural high school. A good resource that offers the criteria for a good liberal arts case study is available at <http://www.bu.edu/ceit/teaching-resources/in-the-classroom/using-case-studies-to-teach/>.

- business students considering the ethical implications of accepting a large Christmas gift from a supplier

<http://www.scu.edu/ethics/dialogue/candc/cases/business-scenarios.html>.

There are many more great sources of case studies on the internet or create one yourself, perhaps with the input of a community partner, that will fit your course material and learning objectives.

'Real World' activities can also be an effective community engaged learning tool. For example:

- economics students in a course on poverty have to create a budget using the amounts they might receive from social assistance.

- biology students are expected to map the travel corridors for endangered turtles in Cootes Paradise.

- social work students have to assess the accessibility of the building where they have their class.

In-Class Projects

You may want your students to be more actively involved with a project that a community suggests but the students continue to work on in the classroom. This may involve bringing in people from that community to introduce the problem and/or mentor the students and/or comment on or judge the results.

- in an Engineering and Design class, students worked in groups to design assistive devices after having consumers consult with them and then the best design was chosen by those same consumers.

- in an Anthropology class on the impact of epidemics on human development, students research, write and publish a book each year focused on a particular epidemic that impacted the Hamilton area.

- in a Business Applied Marketing class students work with companies to develop marketing plans.

Academic Placements in Communities

It may be that your course objectives require students to go out into our communities to meet your learning objectives. In this case you can have your students complete academic placements. These can be done on an individual or group basis. They can be developed by students, faculty and/or with partners in our communities. For example:

- it can be a project where students, as individuals, commit a certain amount of time to a project in a community. In a Social Sciences course on leadership, individual students are expected to spend 30 hours in a placement where they can explore and engage in various models of leadership.

- it can be a group project developed in conjunction with a community partner. In a Political Science class on political participation students worked with a city committee to research new ways to deal with the issue of racial discrimination.

- it can be a project that a partner in one of our communities brings to you. In a Social Work class on social justice and social change a group of students worked with a housing advocacy group in downtown Hamilton to develop and produce a flash mob video on women and homelessness.

Community-Based Research

Finally, you may engage students in the process of research. Again, this can be on an individual, group or class basis. It can be student, faculty or community partner developed. For it to be experiential, it has to go beyond the class research essay assigned to students. For example:

-in a sociology course where students learned quantitative research methods students interviewed people for an agency that was interested in opinions about service provision.

-in a nursing course on social indicators of health, several groups of nurses worked with neighbourhood community groups to determine which issues were most important to the neighbourhood and how they might be addressed.

Once you have decided which types of activities you are going to use, there are some further considerations in your course planning.

How do I Facilitate and Support Student Learning?

Even though they may not prefer it, students are very comfortable with the traditional lecture and assessment format. Community-engaged education and the consequent alternative assessment formats may be new to them. It is important to balance the challenges necessary for learning and growth with support so that students don't get overwhelmed or lost.

Some Ways to Support Students

1. Use the resources available on campus to prepare students to engage with communities.
2. Make sure that the students have an opportunity to get to know their partners in our communities before they engage with them. This can be done by asking our partner to come to the class (if the engagement is external) or having the students investigate the partner agency or organization as part of an assignment.
3. Provide opportunities for discussion about difficulties into the course.
4. Build in very clear directions for assessment.

There is more information on this in Section 4.

The “Communities” in Community-Engaged Education

In community-engaged education we are expecting communities to act as partners in educating our students. It is our responsibility to ensure that we choose activities that meet the needs of our communities as well as our students and that we deal with our community partners respectfully and strive for reciprocity in our relationships with them. Failure to do this will result in a bad experience for everyone and a decrease in opportunities for students as organizations and individuals decide not to engage with us again. Section 6 deals with developing good relationships with communities but in developing your course it is important to begin by answering a few questions.

Does the community partner think that the activity will be useful for them?

It is essential that you include your community partner(s) in the planning process for your course. It is unethical and disrespectful to send students out to engage with communities that has not been prepared or consulted. Similarly, do not have someone come into your classroom unless you have mutually decided what their role will be.

Does the activity(s) I have chosen meet the needs of students and my community partner equally?

For example, if you are going to expect students to spend under 20 hours in an agency or organization in one of our communities you must have very clearly defined, easy projects for them to do. Community partners will not have the time or resources to train, supervise or assign tasks for small time commitments. Make sure that the activity you have chosen will add value rather than deplete resources.

Does the community partner have a clear idea of what my students can provide?

It is important to prepare students for engaging with our communities but sometimes it is also important to prepare our communities for students. One way to do this is to ensure that the community partner has a clear and feasible idea of what they want from students. The development of this should be part of the choice of activity. This ensures that you and the community partner can communicate expectations to the students clearly.

How will I ensure that the relationship with my community partner is maintained and supported?

Community-engaged education is built on relationships so connect with your community partner as often as is feasible. You may have staff in your faculty that will assist you in finding and maintaining contacts in our communities but even then, community partners appreciate expressions of interest from faculty.

Section 4 – Community-Engaged Learning Spaces

As with all forms of education, high quality community-engaged education is determined by creating learning spaces that promote growth in the learner. In this instance learning spaces refer to the experiences the student receives as well as the classroom learning environment. Learning in community-engaged education is driven by the resolution of the dual dialectics of action/reflection and experience/abstraction (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Synergy between course content, and the learning experience is essential for positive learning outcomes (Chupp & Joseph, 2010). The external environment should provide for adequate opportunity to facilitate a learning experience, while course based instruction should allow for adequate critical reflection of the experience.

Environments in our Communities

Dewey (1938) argued that the central issue for experience based education is to select experiences that are fruitful in subsequent experience. That is, experience that leads to student reflection, which in turn leads to individual growth and further experiences, should be the intention of community-engaged education. This cycle of interaction between the student and the environment mediated through reflection leads the student to abstract new concepts and experiences. To achieve such a cycle of learning, student placements need to be significant and should avoid 'make work' projects or merely 'plugging holes' in over stretched organizations. Strong working relationships with community partners will also ensure that learning experiences in our communities are meaningful and rich for students.

Classroom Environment

Community-engaged education is a form of problem posing education with the intent to raise student's critical consciousness by creating and refining knowledge through their experiences, reflective dialogue with peers, and with the course instructor. As mentioned above, critical reflection, including processes of analyzing, re-evaluating, and questioning, is key to any form of community-engaged education. It is important that the course instructor recognize that how course material and classroom atmosphere are created is essential for encouraging dialogue and reflection. Through dialogue and reflection, students gain a deeper understanding of course content as well as particular community issues they may be addressing (Elyer & Giles, 1999). Reflection also fosters a broad appreciation for the topic while enhancing personal values and civic responsibility (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995).

Understanding and respecting students as partners in the learning experience

Traditional courses rely on lectures and texts to provide the learning material for students. The instructor controls this material and in the case of text, the material is static. In community engaged education the student is central in creating the learning material for the course through their engagement in experiences, their reflections and then the sharing of those reflections in class discussion and presentation. In a successful community-engaged course the instructor will work to engage students and help them to feel like a valued part of their learning communities, known and respected by faculty and colleagues.

Learning begins with the learner's experience of the subject matter

The student's experience of the subject matter begins before they participate in a community-engaged educational experience. Knowing that students construct new knowledge and understanding from previous experience, it is important for the instructor to recognize student's previous experiences and build on our understanding of what students already know and believe.

Creating and holding a hospitable space for learning

Community-engaged learning is successful when new experiences and reflection modify previous knowledge and understanding. Kolb and Kolb suggest that by embracing differences regardless if they are differences of skill sets, beliefs, ideas, life experience or values can lead to a better understanding of them. The difficulty resides in creating a learning space where students are safely supported while facing differences that challenge their own systems of knowledge. It can be difficult to explore ideas that conflict with long held beliefs that may have been imparted by parents or other authorities. For example, students working on a budget based on the amount they would receive for social assistance, came to the realization that people were not given enough to live and many of them had very little idea about what most things cost. Students were troubled by their own ignorance, the ignorance of others they had learned from and the new conclusions they drew about the society they lived in. In discussion, it was important to help students to understand why they lacked particular information and what they could do about their own ignorance and the situation.

It is important that the climate of support extends beyond the challenging experience and is maintained throughout the duration of the course. Students continued to bring up this exercise as they learned new things about poverty and social structures. In such situations, discussions can become heated as students struggle with conflicting information.

Some instructors deal with this by developing rules for discussion with their students in initial classes. For example, this could include expectations that students are respectful of other's opinions while being open to challenge themselves.

Making space for conversational learning

As mentioned above, discussion or conversational learning is a central piece of community-engaged learning. This is not usually a part of the traditional lecture style classroom which may restrict or remove dialogue between students and student and course instructor. Conversational learning spaces provide opportunities for reflection and meaning making. Students bring experiences the instructor cannot predict yet can use to enhance learning. When instructors create the atmosphere for a good conversation, facilitating discussion among students they provide an opportunity for the integration of thinking and feeling, talking and listening, leadership and solidarity, recognition of individuality and relatedness, and discursive and recursive processes.

Making space for the development of expertise

Learning not only includes the acquiring of factual knowledge but also the organization of these facts into a conceptual framework and the ability to retrieve this information in order to apply it to later contexts. Deep learning is facilitated best through recursive practices in relation to the student's own goals. We can support this by incorporating opportunities for students to repeat and build on past learning, thereby creating deeper learning experiences which will help them to develop expertise in particular areas and/or skills.

Making space for the cycle of acting and reflecting

Community-engaged learning is best thought of as a continuous cycle of action and reflection. With each opportunity for action there should be an opportunity for reflection and then action based on that reflection and so on throughout the course duration or in some cases throughout a program of study.

Making space for feeling and thinking

There is often a polarization between disciplines that tend to focus on feeling, such as arts based programs versus thinking oriented spaces of business or engineering programs. Some faculties tend to develop practices related to one desired outcome while simultaneously devaluing the other. The influence of reason and emotion are inextricably related in learning and memory. Learning when one is not invested or interested in the material is difficult and interest in the material is not enough to create mastery.

Making space for inside out learning

Inside out learning is a learning process that begins with the student's knowledge, interests, desires and goals that guide their experiences as opposed to structured learning set by experts. Community-engaged education can make space for inside out learning by providing educational experiences that are linked to the learner's interests. Doing so increases the intrinsic motivation of the learner and learning effectiveness. This has the potential to nurture and develop life-long learners. Conversely, a traditional structure based on extrinsic reward can remove the drive for intrinsically motivated learning.

Making space for learners to take charge of their own learning

This is linked to making space for inside out learning. A community-engaged education course can be a significant departure for students from previous, more traditional academic experiences in which they are passive recipients of knowledge. Community-engaged education provides opportunities for students to take control of, and responsibility for, their learning. This can greatly enhance their ability to learn from experience and help them to discover how they learn best as well as develop skills to learn in areas previously uncomfortable for them.

Section 5 – Assessing of Students

Faculty often have questions or concerns about the assessment process for courses with a community-engaged component. However, the assessment of students in community-engaged courses can be very similar to that in traditional courses. As was mentioned before, if we treat community-engaged experiences as just another part of the course material such as the ‘text we may be using’, then it becomes just another a source of information that students must integrate with other aspects of the course such as lectures and readings.

We don’t grade students on how well they read a text or take notes on our lectures, but rather on how they use what they have learned in the text in various ways in their submitted work. If you focus on what students are learning from the experience rather than the experience itself, assessment becomes easier to conceptualize. On the other hand, community- engaged experiences can open up new forms of assessment in addition to traditional ones.

Assessment in a Community-Engaged Course?

There are a number of to assess students’ learning in a course that includes community-engaged learning. They range from the more traditional methods of assessment, such as essays, to some interesting and innovative evaluation techniques such as project and portfolio based assessment which present students with the opportunity to demonstrate what they know, what they have done and what they have learned.

Student Reflection

Having students reflect on their experiences in engaging with communities in an ongoing manner is a central aspect of experiential education. Reflection allows students to investigate and evaluate their experiences, connect this learning to their academics and then build on this learning to expand their understanding of the not only the course material, but the broader world around them (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999; Elyer & Giles, 1999; Hatcher, Bringle, & Muthiah, 2004).

Strong reflection assignments usually include:

- regular opportunity for reflection
- clear student expectations
- clear connection to course content
- instructor feedback and coaching
- challenging questions that encourage students to clarify their values

Such reflection assignments ask students to observe, try to understand what they observe, ask pertinent questions, connect their observations and understandings to course material, and then go beyond their current knowledge and understanding to form new theories and ideas. Of course, as we know, this is the process of learning but having students examine their own learning process through documentation adds another layer of learning and development (Eyler, 2001).

There are many resources, both written and on-line that will assist you with the development of your reflection assignment(s). You can find a number of these on the CLL website at cll.mcmaster.ca. Here is one model that works both for assessment and evaluation. The DEAL model is an adaptable, three-step structure for guiding reflection integrated with critical thinking (Asch, Clayton, & Atkinson, 2005)

1. Students move from **D**escription of their learning experiences to;
2. **E**xamination of those experiences in accordance with specific learning objectives set out by the instructor.
3. **A**rticulated **L**earning the written product, is structured to answer the following questions; “What did I learn”, “How did I learn it”, “Why does it matter”, and “What will I do in light of it”.

Contexts for Reflection

The process of student reflection is very flexible. It can be done individually or with a group. It may or may not include consultation with communities. It may happen before, during or after the community-engaged experience. There may be a product or it may just occur in discussion.

Types of Reflection

Many effective methods for assessing students are based upon written work. Reflections can be presented in written form, either on a periodic basis or as a culminating essay. Journals can be helpful for students to record their impressions, ideas and feelings. Again, you can ask for these to be submitted on a regular basis or ask students to use them as a data source for their final paper. There are also many alternative ways that students can create and present their reflections on their experience. They may wish to use a multi-media approach with the help of their learning portfolio through Avenue to Learn or they might develop a video, blog or website. Students can also present in groups, particularly if their experience was in a group format. Group presentations can be made in class or to the larger university and/or surrounding communities.

Some examples of reflection activities include:

- Students write a letter to themselves when they begin a class examining their expectations of the experience, to be opened when they complete the experience.
- Blogs can be used to reflect on student experiences during their community engagement. These can also be shared with whomever the student chooses, including community partners and participants.
- In some classes students make presentations of their work and reflections as a culminating activity that is then shared with the university and wider communities.

Questions for Reflections

Most students will need direction in creating their reflections. Providing clear questions is an effective way to ensure that students connect what they are doing to the course material. Questions can be general, such as “what was the most interesting thing you observed this week?” to very specific such as “did the students you were working with feel comfortable using the resources provided in our literacy kit?”

Teaching and learning expert Stephen Brookfield developed the “Critical Incident Questionnaire” which includes a series of questions to encourage students to think deeply about a learning experience. These questions can be used as he has written them or they may be adapted to suit the individual needs of your class.

http://stephenbrookfield.com/Dr._Stephen_D._Brookfield/Critical_Incident_Questionnaire.html.

Creating a Product

If you are using a real-life problem as the community-engaged component in your classroom then part of the assessment can be evaluating how well the students solve that problem. For example, if you are working with a community group that would like to know what their service users think of them, then you could have students create, facilitate and report on a focus group of users to both you and that community. Perhaps another group needs an improved website or as mentioned before, students are asked to design an assistive device. While it is difficult to assess students' effort and input into their experience, we can often assess the impact they have had or the products they have created.

Research Papers

Assessment can also include traditional research papers or essays where the experience and learning earned in the community-engaged component of the course are considered to be part of the research required to write on a particular topic. For example, social work students are required to spend 390 hours in a practice setting in their first practicum. The final assignment for the seminar that accompanies the practicum is a 10-15 page paper where students are required to research a topic or case that they found puzzling or problematic. They are required to combine their first-hand experience with academic literature in their area of interest.

Section 6 - Building Collaborative Relationships with our Communities

Universities are a part of the communities in which they are situated, yet are often seen as separate and apart. The reality is that we as faculty members and McMaster as an institution are embedded in a number of communities in a variety of ways. As an instructor wanting to use our communities as an extension of your classroom there are several things to consider and then steps to take.

What can your students offer to our communities?

Take a look at the potential composition of your class. Are they first year students or fourth year? Are they likely to be from one discipline or across disciplines? Will they already have some applicable skills and knowledge, will you be training them or will the community partner have to train them? The answers to these questions will influence the type of community engaged activity your class will undertake.

What do our communities need?

Is there a need in our communities that matches your students? Will working in this area achieve the learning outcomes you want? Will students spend enough time and energy on the task(s) and contribute enough to outweigh the time and energy it takes an organization to host a student?

Too short of a placement, an inappropriate placement or an unprepared or ill-fitted student can mean that all parties end up unhappy. If the group or organization does not have their goals met they may no longer want to work with students from the university. As well, the student will have missed out on a valuable learning experience and may not fulfill the requirements of your course. Thus, it is important to build a relationship with a community partner and together think through any activity based in one of our communities before moving forward

How do I find partners in our communities?

If you think about it you already have connections to your own communities. These include the people with whom you work, volunteer or do business. You can also connect with your faculty office which has staff to help with connections to our communities. In some faculties this is the career services office while other faculties have an office of experiential education. The Student Success Centre also has staff members who are experts in service learning and leadership development.

How do I build a relationship?

Partners in our communities are interested in meeting and working with McMaster faculty so beginning a relationship is often not difficult but maintaining the relationship takes a little bit of forethought and work. It is important to keep in mind the following principles:

1. **The arrangement must be mutually beneficial.** Sometimes we think that our communities should be grateful for our interest and we assume that our students are a gift of free work but we do not understand or acknowledge the amount of work it takes for an organization to host students in a meaningful way. Sometimes students can easily plug into an existing volunteer program where training and supervision is provided but many places do not have volunteer co-ordinators or the volunteer experiences that are offered do not meet the needs of the course. We must ensure that the students we send to community partners have the time, knowledge and skills/capacity to learn skills to provide useful benefits which at least balance the resources expended to host them.

2. **Each party should acknowledge the values, culture, knowledge and skills of the others and be willing and open to learning about each other.**

“To begin with, universities aspire toward an expertise, ... which is often theoretical, global, technical and formalized. Residents of local communities, however, construct their expertise from the experiential or local, often non-technical and informal information that coheres about their lived experience” (Fisher et al., 2005, p. 29).

Faculty and community partners have very different types and sources of knowledge and society tends to value academic/expert forms of knowledge. As a result, we may approach our communities as research subjects or through a paternalistic lens rather than actually getting to know what a neighbourhood, organization or group is like. It is important to spend some time getting to know about your community partner. Check out websites, go to meetings and ask questions. At the same time, it is important to understand that our communities have many misconceptions about the university. Invite people onto the campus, to your lectures and to events.

3. **Equal partnership.** The goal of community-engaged education is to provide students with a unique learning opportunity. We don't provide that opportunity, communities do. In return, it is our job to ensure that we provide communities with resources that assist with the development of capacity. This can be in the form of student time, enthusiasm and expertise and our own expertise. At the institutional level, the university has many resources to offer our community partners. In your role, as much as you can, you should work to make the partnership as equal as possible.

This often requires actively listening to the needs, wants and ideas of the community partner and providing them with the information they need. It is important to recognize that the balance of power, particularly in terms of resources, usually continues to rest with the university.

4. **Such partnerships require time and commitment.** Trust is extremely important in building relationships. It is important that you are clear about your expectations and the support you can provide and that you follow through. You will find that if you teach the same course every year that relationships will deepen and work more easily. This is where an office of community-engaged education can be helpful as staff can build and maintain relationships over several courses and over a span of years.

5. **Transparency.** Clear, open and honest communication is required of all parties. Be clear about what you/the university is getting out of the deal – fulfilling grant requirements, appeasing donors, developing a reputation/edge against other universities/instructors/researchers, educating our students. If we don't state our actual intentions then our communities "will invent them for us" (White, 2010). This relates to trust, as mentioned above. It is also important that we ensure that we clearly understand the expectations, commitments and opinions of our community partners.

6. **The goals and objectives of any project should be clear and agreed upon by all parties.** This relates to transparency. Make sure that you are clear about what you would like from your community partner and why. Ensure that you understand what they see as the benefits for themselves. Sometimes a memorandum of understanding can be useful for large projects or large institutions.

7. **Acknowledging the contributions of all parties.** It is extremely important to acknowledge the contributions of your community partners. You can do this through a letter or card. There are also opportunities to present at events or conferences with your partner and/or to ensure that your partner shares in any media coverage/acknowledgement of the success of your joint endeavours. At times you could be helpful with letters of support for the work of the organization.

8. **Preparing for closure.** Although community partnerships can last for a long time at the institutional level and even the personal level, classes end and it is important to build in endings that value the community partner and student learning. Community partners require feedback about the effectiveness of the course and the experience of the students. We require feedback from communities about if/how the experience was valuable for them.

These principles reflect principles set out by the Canadian Alliance for Community Service-Learning, the American National Society for Experiential Education, and research that has explored what ingredients are essential for good, long-lasting community/academic partnerships (Sandy & Holland, 2006).

Section 7 – Evaluating the Effectiveness of Engaging with Communities

Evaluation is an important aspect of any academic endeavour. In community-engaged education there are several layers of evaluation you might wish to engage in. The first questions you will want to ask yourself are: what is the purpose of the evaluation and who is the intended audience of your results? For example, most of us are concerned with evaluating the effectiveness of the course. Did our students learn what we expected them to learn? How did they experience the course? We may also evaluate a course for ourselves. Was I satisfied with the way I presented the material? Was the workload reasonable? In the case of community-engaged education we also need to evaluate the impact our course had on our communities. Was the student engagement helpful for them? What was their experience of the course?

We may also wish to engage in scholarship of teaching and learning in the area of community-engaged education. This type of evaluation is more specific and intensive.

Course Evaluation

We can use standard scholarly pedagogical techniques to investigate whether we were successful in meeting the needs of students and ourselves but we need to stretch those a bit in order to consider ' needs of our communities as well. Good evaluation begins with course planning. An effective community-based education project or course begins with taking the time beforehand to thoughtfully address the best experience for student learning as well as attending to the needs of our communities. The questions you may wish to ask yourself in developing the course are in bold. If you have considered these questions in developing the course then it will be easier to answer if you have achieved them in an evaluation.

1. What is the academic focus of the project (ie. what are your learning objectives for the students)? How will the project assist students in understanding and integrating their experience with other academic material provided to them?

Your student assessments will give you good information to evaluate this but you may also wish to investigate this directly with the students through surveys, interviews or focus groups.

Asch, Clayton & Atkinson's (2005) DEAL model for guiding student reflection which is discussed in Section 5 can also serve as a basis for collecting evidence about student learning.

You might also want to assess particular aspects of student learning. For example you may want to assess students' change in civic mindedness from the beginning of your course to its completion. Here is a sample survey –

<http://csl.iupui.edu/doc/cmg/cmg-scale.pdf>

2. How will I facilitate and support student learning?

Students will let you know in their course evaluations if they feel that the course was a good balance of challenge and support. As above, if you wish to gather more information you can survey, interview or speak to the students in focus groups.

For example, Rosing et al. (2010) used expanded student evaluations to find out what made community-engaged education difficult for students.

3. What activities will most benefit the students and our communities?

If you have used the principles in section 6 to create activities, in consultation with your community partner that will benefit both the student, and our communities, then you may wish to evaluate if the activities met these criteria. You can assess this with metrics that look at hours served or increases in service provision, or you may wish to interview, survey or hold focus groups that ask students about how the experience impacted them or how the community partner feels the project assisted them.

4. How will I ensure that the relationship with my community partner is maintained and supported?

You will want to have some format for getting feedback from your community partner about their experience of the course. You can do this on an on-going basis or at the conclusion of the course through surveys, interviews or focus groups (if you are working with more than one partner).

5. What do I want to accomplish with my evaluation?

Who is the evaluation for? How will you share the information you learn through your evaluation? Your community partner(s) will want to be included and they are an important part of deciding how you might improve the course. In the end, you will want to share the credit for, and celebrate your successes.

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

Your goal may be to engage in a more intensive form of evaluation of your work as part of your research agenda. While we will not address this type of evaluation here we can give you some starting points to consider. Please remember, that as with course evaluations, the perspectives and involvement of partners in our communities is essential.

For guidelines on good community-based research partnerships, consider Ahmed et al. (2010) "Community Engagement in Research: Frameworks for Education and Peer Review" and consult the CLL Research on Teaching and Learning Guidebook (http://ccl.mcmaster.ca/resources/pdf/redo_guidebook.pdf).

There are also a number of examples of scholarship in the area of community-engaged teaching and learning in the bibliography.

You may wish to start with:

Cooks & Scharrer (2006). "Assessing Learning In Community Service Learning: A Social Approach".

Holland (2001). "A Comprehensive Model for Assessing Service-Learning and Community-University Partnerships".

Section 8 - Best Practices and Ethical Considerations in Community-Engaged Education

This section will describe various best practices, as described in the literature, to consider when deciding to incorporate community-engaged education into a course. It is a reiteration of some of the material in the previous sections but it can act as an important checklist when planning a community-engaged course. The section will also relay information provided by the McMaster Research Ethics Board (MREB). This includes information on research ethics requirements in community-engaged education that are in place at McMaster University, and is particularly relevant to courses that include a research component involving human participants.

Best Practices

Prior to incorporating community-engaged education into a course, it is important to consider the reasons for doing so. Please remember that community-engaged education is not a fit for every course or every instructor; faculty members should have an informed reason or purpose for including a community-engaged education component into their teaching.

There are no specific guidelines that exist for incorporating community-engaged education. However, many best practices have been identified in the literature and are worth keeping in mind when designing a community-engaged educational experience. By considering the following best practices in community-engaged education, instructors can help insure that all stakeholders (students, university and community partner) within a university-community partnership gain maximum benefit while minimizing harm.

Reciprocity

With true reciprocity “every individual, organization, and entity involved in the [community-engaged educational experience] functions as both a teacher and learner. Participants are perceived as colleagues, not as servers or clients” (Jacoby, 1996, p. 36). For a partnership with a community partner to be successful, the relationship must be a reciprocal one (Holland & Gelmon, 2003). Reciprocity should be discussed with a community partner prior to a partnership being formed; this will help to maximize the impact of the partnership while ensuring that all stakeholder expectations are aligned (Maiter et al., 2008).

Sharing Voice and Power with Communities

For a community-university partnership to be successful, it is important for the community partner to have a voice within community-engaged education. The community partner's voice should permeate all levels of the partnership, including aspects such as identifying needs and assets, levels of involvement and potential student roles (Battistoni, 2002). As Morton (1997, p.11) suggests, "both sides need to re-imagine themselves as members of the same community, each with resources to offer, the right to make claims on the other, and a stake that causes them to work out differences". If power-sharing does not occur, social disparities that exist in social structures outside of the partnership can be reproduced to the detriment of the partnership. By including voices from communities in community-engaged education, faculty members will help to ensure a balance of power between themselves and community partners (Maiter et al., 2008).

Preparing Students

Students should be properly prepared prior to participating in a community-engaged educational experience. This includes understanding the differences between charity and social justice (Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000). To help prepare both students and faculty participate in community-engaged education, a resource has been created by the Student Success Centre and is available at <http://ed.ted.com/on/Gm6n0Dwb>. Topics and questions discussed in the resource are listed below:

1) Professionalism

- a. What is expected of students when they work with partners in our communities?
- b. How can students act as ambassadors of the university and uphold a positive professional reputation?

2) Checking Assumptions

- a. How can assumptions be dangerous within communities? How can assumptions damage others?
- b. How can students become aware of and challenge their assumptions?

- 3) Working With vs. For
 - a. Why is the distinction between “with” and “for” important?
 - b. How can students and community partners work together for mutual benefit?

- 4) Engaging vs. Observing
 - a. How can students work in such a way that community partners don't feel as though they are on display of being exploiter?
 - b. How will the community partner see our students?

Clear Expectations

Prior to students undertaking community-engaged education in a course-setting, it is important that they understand and agree to clearly defined expectations. By making expectations clear, faculty members will help to minimize any negative impact on all stakeholders within the community-university partnership.

The following guidelines, adapted from Chapdelaine et al. (2005), provide a clear starting point to think about expectations for students. The guidelines state that students participating in community-engaged education shall:

- 1) Behave as professional representatives of the university at all times.
- 2) Understand their role and its limitations in the context of the experience.
- 3) Adhere to the policies and procedures of the partnering agency.
- 4) Treat service recipients in a manner consistent with ethical principles.
- 5) Fulfill their commitment to an agency in accordance with the course requirements.
- 6) Agree to abide by any legal and ethical guidelines.
- 7) Recognize and reflect upon potential challenges to their personal value systems.
- 8) Carefully consider all aspects of the assignment and consult with faculty members if participation would cause undue distress to personal circumstances.

Ethics Approvals in Community-Engaged Education: Information from McMaster Research Ethics Board (MREB)

*This information has been provided by the McMaster Research Ethics Board.

If you are choosing to give your students assignments that include conducting research with human participants or their records as part of their academic placement, there are a variety of research ethics options available to you.

First, you can obtain a course-based clearance for research exercises completed by the students as a requirement of the course. Here is the link to the application form:

<http://reo.mcmaster.ca/forms>

Second, if students will be conducting their own individual research projects with human participants, each student must submit an application form for review and obtain ethics clearance for his/her project from the MREB. Here is a link to the application form:

<http://reo.mcmaster.ca/forms>

In either instance, the instructor should consult with the MREB well in advance of either of these options so there is enough time for the review and clearance of the course-based request or facilitate the review and clearance of research projects proposed by individual students.

Students who want to do their own research project should make this decision in consultation with their instructor and submit their application **very early** in the term to meet all deadlines. With research ethics much depends on the specific details of each project or course activity. In addition, some organizations (e.g., school boards and social services agencies etc.) have their own research review committees that will need to give permission before the research can begin.

If students are involved in placements where the host organization is completing the research and will be asking the student to assist them with the organization's research as part of the role of their placement, McMaster research ethics clearance may not be required. The exception to this is if the student wishes to use data collected from that research as part of a thesis or other research project. In this instance, the student must obtain ethics clearance at McMaster to use that data.

The MREB welcomes queries from instructors and students and provides advice and feedback on application forms, makes classroom presentations to students and provides help during one-on-one consultations or during their monthly informal ethics drop-in sessions where any researcher can come in for advice.

Please feel free to contact McMaster Research Ethics Board directly for more information:

e. ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca or szalak@mcmaster.ca

t. 905-525-9140, ext. 23142 or 26117

w. <http://reo.mcmaster.ca>

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