Experiential learning in design and social sciences: dialogue, reflection and social learning in the city

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“Arcades in Thessaloniki: memory and emerging entrepreneurialism”
Project began 2017

Structure of the paper:

I. Introduction
II. Background
III. The local research experience
IV. US experience in the classroom
V. Discussion of students’ educational experience
VI. Conclusion
2017, Arcades in Thessaloniki: memory and emerging entrepreneurialism

• Direct goals: engage stakeholders and community members in dialogue over revitalization and entrepreneurial activities in the commercial arcade “Stoa Malakopi” in the city of Thessaloniki Greece.

• Created a programmed event that introduced a new focus on community discussion on common issues, individual innovations, and motivations of the stakeholders, placed back in the space.

• Explore understanding of experiential learning as experimental thought and activity based on Dewey, and interaction between people, environment, and artifacts (Miettinen 2000).
2017, Arcades in Thessaloniki: memory and emerging entrepreneurialism

- Collaboration: interdisciplinary perspectives

- Reflection: on pedagogical issues inherent in Graphic Design, as a practice-based discipline with a user-centered emphasis, and social sciences.

- Tentative summation: opportunities for social learning, dialogue and critical reflection offered to students as well as ourselves as educators. As a continuing activity at a distance, principles of open education have also become important in our next iteration of educational activities.
ACT/NCSU

Phase one: field research (June-July 2017),

Phase two: data analysis, creation of design assets and programming of the event hosted at the Stoa (August-December 2017).

Phase three: The two faculty leads, three local ACT students and one NCSU student engaged in the field research stage; fourteen NCSU Graphic Design students joined the project in the second and third phase online, as part of the common Service Learning course.
Dewey’s model of reflective thought and action. (In Miettinen 2000)

1. Disturbance and uncertainty: habit does not work
2. Intellectualization and definition of the problem
3. Studying conditions of situation and formation of working hypothesis
4. Reasoning
5. Testing hypothesis in action

Idea, concept
Solution of the problem and control of the action
Why—

- Students have limited engagement with the community site (one that lasts a three-month academic term) and organizational in-the-here-and-now demands, which might detach their role and inputs from the everyday workings of the organization.

- Miss opportunities for ongoing engagement with problem identification and problem solving, critical reflection, reasoning and evaluation of their activities.

- Students remark on their lack of insight into the local community needs and desires, and limited opportunities for collaboration with the stakeholders beyond one-to-one interactions with their mentors.

- Student uncertainty as to whether assessments and proposals would be followed-through, resulting in a reduced sense of contribution and agency.
Rethinking conditions of current service learning: Social Sciences and Design: ACT and NCSU—

• Re-examine Dewey’s reflection and action process of learning as a process of social learning, as opposed to the more solitary and subjective process of experiential learning (see Miettinen’s 2000 critique).

• ‘Learning through participatory systems such as groups, networks, organizations and communities, in conditions which are new, unexpected, uncertain, conflictual and hard to predict’ (Wildemeersch et al. 1998, p. 252),

• Rethink roles of student stakeholder and educator.

• The development of agency.
Phase one:
Graphic Design: existing course matrix: sophomore year leading to first semester junior year.
Concept map structure: NCSU Graphic Design department, conceptual framework for introduction to user-centered design, sophomore first semester studio.
Example of application of concept map to professional design studio work to be shared with clients, designers and stakeholders (Dubberly Design Group).
The problem of presenting users as highly abstracted personas through traditional instruction takes away from any real context-based practice of learning in an unpredictable environment destabilized by technology, global economics and other factors.

Model of agency from Constitution of Society (Giddens 1984). Giddens postulates agency through feedback and feedforward, where members are thinking and acting in an ever-changing social context.
Experimental service learning course redesign 2017. Revised as ‘field of inquiry’, in which course units are designed as more random access online. The dynamic became dialogical (through collaborative teams) in exchange and feedback.

**Initial collaboration**

**Course units**
- community engagement principles
- social science methodologies and practices
- ethics in community research
- context-dependent background readings
- student reflection diaries
- collective working documents — (e.g. dissemination materials)

**Shared interpretive framework**
- historical practices
- settings
- behaviors/attitudes
- contemporary practices

**Student outcomes**
- interpretation methods
- translation and clarification

**Field of inquiry**
- motivation: agency in providing service
- interpretation through story-telling

**Student outcomes**
- clarification and feedback
- sense-making
- historical and contemporary issues
- analysis of interview texts

**Course units**
- semiology of graphics
- technical instruction and production
- formal design principles
- visual narrative construction
- information design
Proposed “limited” (networked participation) open education model for service learning

Course units

- community engagement principles
- social science methodologies and practices
- ethics in community research
- context-dependent background readings
- student reflection diaries
- collective working documents – (e.g. dissemination materials)

OE conceptual framing

- historical practices
- settings
- behaviors/attitudes
- contemporary practices

Archive of past works as case-studies with meta tags

Field of inquiry

- interpretation methods
- situational interpretation
- data gathering
- translation and clarification
- sense-making
- historical and contemporary issues
- analysis of interview texts
- clarification and feedback

Course units

- semiology of graphics
- technical instruction and production
- formal design principles
- visual narrative construction
- information design