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WORKING WITH THE COMMUNITY:

Reflections from an Instructional Design Service-Learning Project

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STUDENT AUTHOR BIO SKETCHES

Daniela Rezende Vilarinho-Pereira is a doctoral student in the Learning Design and Technology Program at Purdue University. Her research interests include the role of digital technology in creativity development, student motivation and academic engagement, and talent development.

Shivani Ramoutar is a doctoral student in the Learning Design and Technology Program at Purdue University. Her present research focus is on the use of geospatial tools and techniques in education. She enjoys working with students and teachers to integrate technology into the classroom, to increase student interest and enjoyment in subject material as well as their technological aptitude.

Emily J. Justus is a doctoral student in the department of entomology at Purdue University. Her project focuses on the factors that influence insect behavior. She has been involved in community outreach and engagement throughout her undergraduate and graduate career. In this article she and her peers describe their experience developing training modules for United Way of Greater Lafayette.

INTRODUCTION

A service project was a key component of our practical course experiences in the Learning Design and Technology Program at Purdue University. This service project fulfilled a need for United Way volunteer coordinators. The reciprocal nature of service-learning means that while the needs of United Way were met, our experience was grounded in active participation and service experiences by engaging with the community (Furco, 1996; Sigmon, 1979). In this project, we adopted the definition of service-learning suggested by Bringle and Hatcher (1996) where service-learning is an organized activity that met identified community needs to train United Way volunteer coordinators. Ultimately, students were able to reflect on their experiences, which enhanced “understanding of course content, a broader appreciation

of the discipline and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility” (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996, p. 222).

In the United States, approximately 77 million people volunteer through different organizations (Corporation for National and Community Service [CNCS], 2018). Volunteer work is defined as an integration of productive work that involves human capital that is displayed by collective behavior and guided by ethics (Wilson & Musick, 1997). The benefits of community and volunteer partnerships are numerous, and this facilitates awareness, leadership skills, and community-partnership collaborations (Bennett, 2012). Investments in volunteer programs are rewarding due to fiscal and service benefits for private and public organizations (Ivonchuk, 2019). Additionally, the individual benefits of volunteer work include work experience acquisition, development of

personal characteristics, and motivational needs such as value and esteem (McCormick & Donohue, 2019).

For the success of volunteer programs at the individual, organizational, and community level, volunteer coordinators are essential. A volunteer coordinator is “an individual who provides oversight, guidance, and structure to the volunteer program” (Schreiner et al., 2018, p. 243). According to Schreiner et al., the role of volunteer coordinators is not just limited to implementing management strategies, but also includes serving as a leader for the volunteers. To effectively perform these roles, the authors suggest organizations should invest in training for their volunteer coordinators. A well-designed training has the potential to prepare volunteer coordinators to meet the volunteers’ needs, creating a positive long-term relationship among volunteers, volunteer coordinators, and the organization.

In this service-learning project, we designed and developed a training for the volunteer coordinator of the United Way of Greater Lafayette. United Way is a fundraiser and a social service provider that aims to facilitate the coalescing of people, organizations, and resources in order to leverage resources for the benefit of communities. One of the services provided by United Way is a training to assist volunteer coordinators to develop skills related to skill-based volunteering, recruitment, retention, and recognition so they can run volunteer programs in their organizations. Based on the formal and informal interviews with the United Way and volunteer coordinators, the main gap identified in the United Way training was the lack of resources and continuous training. Thus, our task in this service-learning project was to design and develop a face-to-face training for volunteer coordinators for United Way of Greater Lafayette. The instructional goal identified for this training was: Volunteer coordinators will effectively apply recruitment, retention, and recognition strategies to run episodic and skill-based volunteer programs in their own contexts.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The service-learning project was an embedded component of a required course in the Learning Design and Technology program at Purdue’s College of Education. EDCI 572 (Learning System Design) is an introductory course with a focus on the processes of instructional design within a project-based context. During the course students go through each step of the instructional design process by using the Dick and Carey Systems Approach Model for Designing Instruction (Dick et al., 2014). A primary focus of the course is on the design of effective

learning design strategies that are motivating, efficient, and effective. Additionally, students learn the practical aspects of instructional or learning systems design in the classroom and workplace while completing project work. In previous years, service projects were integrated into this course.

In this way, the EDCI 572 course aims become very real and applied since the students have the opportunity to work with a client to solve a problem. The provision of an accessible instructional design fills a real gap in the quality of training that volunteer coordinators receive by providing real and meaningful opportunities to engage and develop a core set of skills. Self-determination theory (SDT) supports the premise that people are likely to associate with volunteer identities if they are engaged in real and meaningful opportunities (van Schie et al., 2019). The development of volunteer infrastructure has a very tangible impact on whether or not people choose to volunteer, and our training strengthens this by providing opportunities for skill development (Pantea, 2015). Finally, the training aims at retaining the volunteers since a well-established pool of skilled people can improve the quality of services and work done across the different organizations. Participating in organizational events such as volunteer training in our example and social group inclusion are strong factors that encourage retention among volunteers (Waters & Bortree, 2012).

In addition to contributing to the broader community, the primary objective for the service-learning project is to provide students opportunities to work as a group with a real client to utilize their instructional design skills on an instructional design project while learning the foundations of instructional design. To that end, students greatly benefit from analyzing instructional design problems and developing instructional solutions. In addition to improving instructional design skills, these experiences are also helping students to improve their teamwork, problem solving, communication, and critical thinking skills.

SERVICE-LEARNING OPPORTUNITY

Our class worked with United Way of Greater Lafayette, which aims to create positive change in communities by mobilizing volunteers to improve lives. United Way fulfills this mission by facilitating volunteer opportunities and coordinating resources within the community. United Way of Greater Lafayette is located in Lafayette, Indiana but serves all of Tippecanoe County. The local Greater Lafayette chapter is a part of a larger organization of over 1,800 chapters in 41 countries. The volunteer engagement

center provides training opportunities that cater to the needs of the community. Such examples include opportunities at homeless shelters, hospices, food pantries, and the American Red Cross (United Way of Greater Lafayette, 2020). Skills-based volunteering is another initiative where volunteers use talents such as art, music, language, and communication to engage with a variety of opportunities. Examples of this include coordinating adult education, social media, and family center events through painting, internships, and teaching (United Way of Greater Lafayette, 2020).

United Way also offers many opportunities for students to get involved in volunteerism. For example, United Way organizes Purdue’s Month of Service. This opportunity promotes services within Purdue’s community and encourages student groups to give back to Lafayette. The opportunity for us to work with United Way was identified by our instructor, Dr. Secil Caskurlu, and was a unique experience available to EDCI 572 students in the fall semester of 2019. The United Way of Greater Lafayette needed training for volunteer coordinators, because turnover is very high and many volunteer coordinators have little or no formal training.

We developed instructional material following the Dick and Carey Systems Approach Model for Designing Instruction (Dick et al., 2014). The Dick and

Carey Model provides a detailed, systematic approach to developing instruction, which is ideal for novice instructional designers (Dick, 1996). As a system, the Dick and Carey Model considers all components—learners, instructors, instructional materials, and learning environment—which are all important in the process of achieving the learning goal. This model is used in the phases of designing, developing, implementing, and evaluating the instruction. The steps proposed by the Dick and Carey Model interact with each other in such a way that each step is developed with inputs from preceding steps and provides outputs for the following steps (Dick et al., 2014).

As a result of adopting the model, instructional designers come up with effective instruction or, in case problems are identified, with information to determine how to improve the instruction. The components or steps of the model are addressed in Table 1.

We first gathered information through an interview with the director of engagement from United Way of Greater Lafayette, and a focus group of volunteer coordinators from around Tippecanoe County. From these interviews, we decided to create four modules that provide volunteer coordinators with the information and tools they need to successfully develop a volunteer program: skill-based volunteering, recruitment, retention, and recognition.

Table 1. Description of the outputs for each stage of the Dick and Carey Model.

Stage	Output
1—Identify Instructional Goal(s)	Volunteer coordinators will apply recruitment, retention, and recognition strategies to run episodic and skill-based volunteer programs in their own contexts.
2—Conduct Instructional Analysis	Small-scale institutional analysis conducted.
3—Analyze Learners and Contexts	Learners: United Way Volunteer coordinators. Data derived from focus group and client interview: Entry Skills, Prior Knowledge, Motivation for Instruction, and Attitudes toward Instruction.
4—Write Performance Objectives	These were developed under each section: Skill-based Volunteering, Recruitment, Recognition, Retention.
5—Develop Assessment Instruments	Ex.: Group activities, role play, personal introspection, and case study.
6—Develop Instructional Strategy	Ex.: Lectures, reading, hands-on and group activities, brainstorming, and networking.
7—Develop and Select Instructional Materials	Ex.: PowerPoint presentations, handouts, case studies, worksheets, story share, and video.
8—Design and Conduct Formative Evaluation of Instruction	Assessment conducted during design phase; feedback obtained from United Way. Unable to evaluate entire module due to time constraints.
9—Revise Instruction	Each step was revised along the process.
10—Design and Conduct Summative Evaluation	Unable to conduct summative assessment, because our main focus was not on implementation, and this will be done in the future.

WORKING WITH THE COMMUNITY



Figures 1 and 2. Authors working on their instructional materials in the EDCI 572 class. Photos courtesy of Dr. Secil Caskurlu.

Our class consisted of 13 students, who were split into four groups to design for each module.

The EDCI 572 instructor allotted approximately 40 minutes at each class meeting for the groups to work on the service-learning project (see Figures 1 and 2). There were also opportunities for whole-class discussion involving all groups to discuss any common issues. The groups also met outside of class and used social media, such as Google Docs and WhatsApp (a popular mobile message app), to share documents, create the modules, and communicate about the project.

Following the steps in the Dick and Carey Model, we used the information gathered in the interviews to identify instructional goals and analyze learners' needs as well as the learning and performance context. We then determined the performance objectives and developed criterion-referenced tests, instructional strategies, and instructional materials. As a result of this project, the United Way has four systematically designed modules, each including the materials (i.e., PowerPoint presentation, supporting media and materials) needed for facilitation. Furthermore, each module included a detailed facilitation guide needed for any experienced volunteer coordinator to facilitate a training program. Additionally, we supplied the United Way with an Instructional Design Document outlining the results of our analysis and the reasoning behind our design choices.

Additionally, as a part of our project, we presented a showcase of our work (see Figure 3) for students and faculty of the Learning Design and Technology Program. Students in our class now have hands-on experience systematically designing instruction for a client.



Figure 3. Dr. Secil Caskurlu introducing our service-learning project at the showcase. Photo courtesy of Holly Fiock.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

As agreed upon since we started this partnership with United Way, our role in this project did not involve the implementation and evaluation of the training because of time constraints, but to design and develop face-to-face training for volunteer coordinators. After going through all the phases of designing and developing the training, all the material our class created was shared with our contact at United Way, so they could implement the training the following year.

Although we were not able to measure the effect of our project on the work of United Way, it is possible to predict some potential outcomes. First, this project's main goal for our client was to develop a training that any United Way employee could use to train volunteer

coordinators—which would remove the burden of training from only one person—in this case, from the director of engagement at the time. Considering the importance of delivering this training consistently and on a regular basis, it is safer to have standard training materials that any member of the United Way team can use to conduct the training sessions. This goal was accomplished by the detailed materials developed for this project, especially the Facilitator’s Guide for each module. In the Facilitator’s Guide, we provided a checklist for the tasks that should be done before the training sessions, and the agenda for the session day, with the description of each activity and its duration. An Instructional Design Document was also created, so the facilitator can understand how the training was designed. It is important to stress that the training was designed to be implemented without our continuous support.

The second potential outcome is related to the training effectiveness. In the process of designing the training, we intentionally aligned learning outcomes, learner characteristics, learning and performance context, instructional activities, and assessments as established in the Dick and Carey Model (Dick et al., 2014). We believe that the implementation of each module will meet its purpose, and by the end of the training, volunteer coordinators will effectively apply recruitment, retention, and recognition strategies to run episodic and skill-based volunteer programs in their own contexts. As mentioned before, volunteer coordinators have an important role in the success of a volunteer program. The training for volunteer coordinators developed by our class has the potential to improve their skills. As a consequence, this training will have a chain impact: (a) volunteer coordinators will develop the necessary skills in managing and leadership domains, (b) as volunteer coordinators implement their new acquired skills, they will create an environment of respect and organization that leads to positive volunteer experiences, (c) satisfied volunteers will be more willing to commit to the program and its cause, increasing the probability of success, and finally, (d) the success of the volunteer program means a significant and positive change to the community served by these volunteers. We hope that with this training, volunteer coordinators will be able to structure a more cohesive group of volunteers and have a bigger impact. Our work will have an indirect impact in the community.

A third outcome was the impact this project had on the Learning Design and Technology community from Purdue. In addition to the impact this project had on the students who participated in it, our showcase was an opportunity to inspire and stimulate faculty to implement service-learning projects in their courses. For the

colleagues who attended our showcase, our experience was an example of how they can partner with a nonprofit organization so they can explore new potential clients for whom to provide instructional design services and develop their skills.

Considering the important service charities such as United Way provide to society, we can assure that our whole class took this service-learning project very seriously. The sense of responsibility shared by us and our classmates made us overcome all the challenges a big project like ours has—working in teams, communicating with a busy client, meeting the deadline, such as others that we will cover together with our accomplishments in the next section.

STUDENT IMPACT

The experience of participating in a service-learning project like the one we had was definitely professionally and personally rewarding. The challenge of working for a real client that helps communities grow added an extra motivation to do our best on this massive project. With four modules of face-to-face instruction, this project was very intimidating for novice instructional designers. Students participating in this class had a range of backgrounds, from career teachers to novice graduate students with little to no experience in instruction or instructional design. Throughout our class and service-learning project we were taught concepts and theories, but we were able to apply these theories and concepts to a real-world context and go beyond the conventional hypothetical classroom scenarios. We prepared for each step of the instructional design process in real time, learning the concepts and theory in class and then directly applying this knowledge to our service-learning project. In this way, we were prepared for each step needed to complete the service-learning project. The hands-on experience we all got from this project can be applied to any scenario where we need to design instruction in our future careers.

The modules we helped create can be included in our instructional design portfolio, which can be referenced when applying for jobs. Furthermore, in addition to improving our instructional design skills, this project also provided opportunities to work with a subject matter expert (the director of engagement) and a large team of instructional designers to design and develop a cohesive product, thereby increasing our communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills, and strong organizational and time management skills. Overall, this authentic learning experience provided us with skills that will be useful in any career path to develop and create learning solutions that

drive measurable impact to the organization and align to the organization's and learners' needs.

Additionally, two students in our class (one of them being the third author of this paper) wrote a grant proposal for the Community Service/Service-Learning Student Grant Program, and we received funding to support the showcase event where we presented this service project and shared our experiences. The grant provided supplied refreshments at the event as well as printing material to advertise the showcase. This was an important opportunity for those students to improve their grant-writing skills, including creating a budget and developing a concise project narrative.

If we were to improve this experience, we would suggest that instructors of EDCI 572 choose a service-learning project that would include the possibility of implementing the instruction, even if it is just a pilot of the training. This would allow students to measure their instructional design success. Being able to see the results of our hard work would have been rewarding, and we also could have evaluated the effectiveness of our modules. However, we are aware that this might be difficult in a semester-long project.

CONCLUSION

This service-learning project allowed us to see the bigger picture that involves the instructional design field. Designing, developing, and implementing effective instruction give us the opportunity to make great changes in our society, from K–12 and higher education to professional development, and also find places where people need to improve their skills, so they can do something good for themselves and others. As students, we need more authentic learning experiences that allow us to develop essential skills for our careers. Additionally, the possibility to give back to society shows us a different and important facet of our field—the social role of instructional designers. Knowing the positive impact of this experience, the faculty from the Learning Design and Technology Program will continue integrating service-learning projects into the course.

Our practice in this service-learning project taught us how to deal with challenges from the real-world market. However, it was only possible because Dr. Cecil Caskurlu gave us the tools, conditions, and support we needed. As we publicize our experience, we hope more instructors become inspired by it and seek more opportunities like ours, but also create the necessary conditions for their students to succeed.

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