
High Impact Pedagogy in Theatre: Service Learning in Voice and Movement for Theatre Majors

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Abstract: Service Learning in a sequence of Voice and Movement classes integrated experiential learning to understand accents. Students acquired skills, observed clients in Service Learning placements, reflected on best practices, and wrote about and portrayed characteristics of local characters in original monologues. Service Learning improved verbal and nonverbal communication in community.

Keywords: Service Learning, High-Impact Pedagogy, Voice, Movement, Acting, Theatre, Actor Training

1. Introduction

Service Learning and community-based learning have become essential to community engagement since the early 2000s. In the increasingly competitive job market, employers hire applicants who have experience in their chosen fields. To gain experience, many students benefit from experiential learning in academic courses by integrating classroom learning in real world settings. With experiential learning as part of the instructional strategy, students learn theories and practice skills in class and apply these skills at community-based agencies in the field. By assessing and solving real world problems to meet community needs, students use critical thinking, practice their skills *in situ*, and reflect on their practical experiences to improve performance in class and onstage. In Rick Reis' review of George D. Kuh's book, *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*, he pointed out that of High-Impact pedagogies, including: first-year seminars, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, collaborative assignments, undergraduate research, global/diverse learning, service/community learning, internships, and capstone courses/projects...Service Learning and student-faculty research show the most promise. [1]

Further, Simonet (2008) affirmed Kuh's (2005) assertion about the added value of Service Learning in higher education: "Service-learning is recognized as one among many effective practices that stimulate greater levels of

student involvement in "educationally purposeful activities," which, in turn, produce greater retention." [2] By combining Kuh's most effective High-Impact strategies, Service Learning and student-faculty research in Voice and Movement class paired an instructional model with an ongoing feedback loop through which students continuously improve. By learning best practices and giving back to the community on a weekly basis over two years, students engaged with community agencies to become better citizens, potential employees, and artists.

Voice and movement training cultivates interpersonal communication and self-expression. In a sequence of voice and movement courses over two years, students learned vocal and physical expression in class and applied newly acquired academic theories and skills in individual community placement settings. . Students observed clients, critically assessed best practices in effective communication, suggested and coached vocal and physical changes to improve communication, and reflected on their personal development and the changes in their clients in community placements to improve interpersonal communication and meet their individual community placement needs. Students incorporated community-based vocal and physical characteristics into original monologues based on local characters in the capstone assignment. These Voice and Movement classes provided valuable resources in customized Service Learning in individual community placements through collaboration on community-based activities at local agencies. As a result, students cultivated a compassionate

attitude towards their clients and improved interpersonal vocal and physical communication with their clients and supervisors in community placements. Community engagement developed vocal and physical skills in students and clients in real world situations at their community-based agencies.

Service Learning became integral to teaching voice and movement in 2012. That year, a Service Learning component in a study abroad program modeled community engagement for voice and movement classes. In summer, study abroad students engaged in mutual language exchange with Tibetan refugees and earned a service learning transcript notation for the first time. Leadership of Service Learning in India offered the opportunity to examine how mutual language exchange could increase awareness of nuances in accents from a particular Southern city for voice and movement students. Service Learning was formally integrated into Voice and Movement I in fall semester 2012 and Voice and Movement II in spring semester 2013. Building on this success, Blue Cross Blue Shield sponsored a Service Learning grant to study best practices in Voice and Movement in Service Learning in Croatia in summer of 2013 [3]. Observation of community-based Croatian theatre programs enhanced commitment to community engagement and contributed to the revision of the syllabi for the freshmen and sophomore Voice and Movement sequence. Global and local approaches to Service Learning increased the quality of observation, recording, and transcription of accents and provided a model for student coaching of voice and movement in the local community.

Freshmen enrolled Voice and Movement I in spring semester; sophomores enrolled in Voice and Movement II in fall semester. Each semester, freshman and sophomores attended the on-campus Service Learning Fair where they met managers and coordinators from more than 25 community agencies during the second week of classes. Prior offering agency placements to students, the university had vetted these agencies and signed memoranda of understanding. These community agencies served underprivileged youth in after-school programs, cancer patients in no-cost accommodations, recovering addicts at residential treatment centers and thrift stores, homeless adults and survivors of domestic violence in shelters, seniors in day programs and nursing homes, and low-income residents in legal and social programs. [4] By having the opportunity to meet the agency coordinators and ask questions about the organizational mission and expectations, responsibilities, training, and placement hours for the Service Learning placement, students assessed the compatibility of placement before they applied for the Service Learning positions. After students reviewed their class schedules and theatrical commitments, they applied for individual Service Learning placements. If the agency offered a Service Learning position to a student, the student was required to accept a Service Learning placement by the end of the third week of the 16-week semester. Students served in a community-based settings for at least one hour per week for 10 weeks in one

semester in both freshman and sophomore years. Before beginning their community-engaged learning, students studied the agency website, attended agency trainings, and journaled about who they expected to meet and what they expected to do at their Service Learning placements. During the semester, students wrote four reflections, wrote a research paper on Service Learning, and penned an original character monologue based on vocal and physical characteristics of agency clients. As the final exam, students performed original monologues to connect academic assignments with Service Learning.

This Southern city is a unique cultural blend of social groups. To dispel the myth that there is only one accent in this city, students in Voice and Movement observed the oral posture of their clients based on how they shaped their lips, raised or lowered their jaws, lifted or flattened the roof of their mouths, and rounded or spread their tongues advocated in the Knight-Thompson Speechwork method. [5] Further, students noted breathing patterns, placement of resonance (head, nose, mouth, or chest), and articulation of consonants and vowels. Students practiced for their Service Learning placements by listening to each other and discussing how these vocal adjustments influenced each other's sounds. Using Laban Movement Analysis, students studied each other's posture, gestures, timing, and spatial usage as they stood, sat, moved, and walked. Laban Effort qualities created by dance theorist Rudolf Laban consisted of: Space (direct/indirect), Weight (strong/light), Time (sudden/sustained), and Flow (bound/free). [6] By practicing with peers in class, students gained skill and confidence.

In their individual community-based placements, students invited specific clients to participate in Institutional Board of Review-approved data collection during the semester. Student selected particular clients to interview onsite. When a particular client agreed, students obtained written permission from the client and the agency on Informed Consent Forms to observe and notate vocal and physical observations. The students, clients, and supervisors signed and turned in the Informed Consent forms in class.

During the semester, students listened to and watched how the clients spoke, moved, and recorded vocal and physical observations of their clients in their reflection journals. Then, students reread journal entries and identified examples from these data to generate hypotheses about the client's accent and movement. Using the International Phonetic Alphabet, students transcribed phrases spoken by clients. [7] Students formulated a detailed hypothesis of how their clients spoke and moved, analyzed the impact of these observations on the character, incorporated vocal and physical characteristics in an original monologue, and performed in original monologue character in class.

In both Voice and Movement I & II, reflections were designed to as specific prompts that synthesized lessons and assignments in class with their vocal and physical observations from the individual Service Learning placements. Four reflective writing assignments were strategically placed throughout the semester. In the first

reflection, students described their expectations of interactions with clients at their Service Learning placement and the social injustice issue addressed in the agency's mission statement. To promote connection between classroom assignments and community placements, each student observed a worker in daily life, performed a minute of select moments from this worker's life in class, and reflected on how their portrayal of this worker impacted their actions in individual placements at community agencies. In the second reflection, students described vowels and consonants that they heard at the agency, recommended vocal adjustments to improve a client's intelligibility, discussed how to share these suggestions, and which change(s) they expected to hear. In the third reflection, students reflected on how the client responded to the oral and physical posture and gestural suggestions and what they could do to improve their communication skills with the clients. In response to an assignment on the "how" of dynamic movement in class, students observed and recorded the Laban Movement Efforts and Shape qualities of the client's movement at the agency. In the fourth reflection, students assessed how their preconceived notions of Service Learning at the agency changed during their placements, how their community-based observations informed their character monologues, and how they would incorporate voice and movement lessons learned into their acting and their lives. During the three years that Service Learning was implemented in Voice and Movement I and II, the reflective prompts changed slightly to accommodate the needs of the university program and community agencies.

2. Voice and Movement I

In spring semester 2013, Voice and Movement I promoted an understanding of vocal and physical mechanisms such as anatomical breath support, articulation, and expressive movement to create dynamic characters. In the Service Learning community placements, students observed oral and physical posture, articulation, center of resonance, and movement. Each class formulated a collective theory of local accents in this Southern city. Next, students customized the vocal and physical characteristics for their unique characters in original monologues. [8] In the first year of Voice and Movement I with the Service Learning component, the 75% of the Service Learning grade was based on the quantity and quality of the students' participation onsite and 25% of was based on the quality of their reflections on their Service-Learning experiences.

In Voice and Movement I in spring semester 2014 and 2015, students had similar goals, objectives, and learning outcomes, but the weight of the Service Learning reflections grade increased from 25% to 40%. [9] Because the assessment of performance data collection in the context of contemporary voice and movement theory was important to understanding voice and movement in community-based settings, students received half of the points for each of the two drafts of five-page research papers and Voice &

Movement Character Analyses. [9] In spring semester 2015, students were required to complete at least half of their Service Learning hours by midterm to receive credit for Service Learning in their midterm grades to ensure students served at their Service Learning placements over 10 weeks. In this process, the reflection, research, and writing components became increasingly important to affect change in the Service Learner.

3. Voice and Movement II

In fall semester 2012, the objectives for Voice and Movement II included academic and experiential research, analysis, and application of vocal and physical theories to character portrayal in Service Learning placements. The following objectives promoted acquisition and application of voice and movement theories in class and sharing voice and movement skills with clients in Service Learning placements.

- a. Observe vocal and physical techniques in community-based service placements
- b. Coach movement and voice practices in community-based service placements.
- c. Formulate a thesis statement on a local original character based on academic and vocal-physical performance research.
- d. Reassess and revise the thesis statement about the character based on the relative importance of the data collected, practical observation, a literature review, and experiential research.
- e. Embody the revised character thesis in an oral and/or written presentation.
- f. Compare methodologies of characterization in plays and Service Learning experiences. [11]

In the Service Learning component, students planned how to observe and interact with clients in onsite activities for 15 hours over 10 weeks. Students received equal points for:

- a. Quantity and quality of participation onsite.
- b. Five reflective journals
- c. Recordings of before and after video interviews with a client from the agency
- d. Quality of demonstrated learning through written and performative reflection. [11]

In class, students had the opportunity to practice interviewing other students to prepare for the assessment of the clients' vocal and movement at individual Service Learning placements. First, students asked each other to describe the street, neighborhood, and town where they grew up. When people tell stories from childhood, they are more likely to speak in their native accents and move habitually. Therefore, one student asked another student to tell a story about where they grew up. At the end of the semester, Voice and Movement II students incorporated excerpts from video interviews and observations from reflections in research papers and original character monologues. These video interviews were one of the chief distinctions between Voice and Movement I and II. By practicing interviewing in class, students tended to conduct more successful interviews in the

field.

In fall semester 2013, the Voice and Movement II course objectives were streamlined. Students analyzed and applied vocal and physical theories in class and conducted experiential research in community-based placements to create and portray a composite of community characters in an original monologue. [12] The learning outcomes closely tied the students' voice and movement observations in the Service Learning placement to class assignments. In the beginning of the semester, students enacted fairytales to expand their vocal and physical ranges. At midterm, students memorized historical letters to precisely embody the vocal and movement qualities of historical persons. Students compared and contrasted their acting choices in the fairytales and letters in reflections. In the Service-Learning placement, students and clients at the community agency completed Informed Consent forms. Then, students recorded a pre-and post-placement interviews with clients. Students asked clients to describe where they grew up, invited clients to read "The Rainbow Passage" aloud, and encouraged clients to tell a childhood story. [13] The Rainbow Passage is one of the passages that contains all of the sounds in the English language. Additionally, students talked with and informally observed clients at the Service-Learning placements throughout the semester. To better understand diverse accents of this Southern city, students interviewed three additional speakers from the community. At midterm, students wrote monologues based on client interactions at the individual placements and transcribed monologues using the International Phonetic Alphabet. At the final exam, students performed their original monologues based on a composite of local characters. By listening to, writing about, and transcribing community accents, students better understood how their own accents were similar to and different from their clients' accents. Points for these assignments were allocated as follows:

- a. 25 points for each of five journal entries
- b. 25 points for writing a community character monologue
- c. 25 points for IPA transcription of the monologue
- d. 50 points each for 5 videos of native speakers
- e. 100 points for a five-page paper referencing three peer-reviewed articles on accents and analysis of the clients' accents
- f. 150 points for the on-site supervisor's evaluation of the 15-hour placement
- g. 50 points for the performance of an original community accent monologue. [8]

In fall semester 2014, students refined their vocal and physical performance skills to speak and move confidently. [14] Service Learners led acting, movement, and voice activities in drama groups, played athletic and board games with clients, tutored clients in reading and computer skills, conversed with clients, and observed how the clients moved and spoke in the Service Learning agencies. By practicing vocal and physical skills learned in class with clients onsite, students improved their critical thinking through assessment, debate, and refinement of theories and practices learned in

class. To accommodate student feedback from prior semesters, Service Learning reflections increased in value, video interviews were eliminated, points were divided between two drafts of the accent papers, and points for the final performance of the original community character monologues were doubled in the subsequent semester. For research papers, students grounded their observations in contemporary voice and movement theories from at least three relevant peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, or books. Students analyzed how their characters' accents differed or resembled other accents based on the neighborhoods where their clients and characters resided in this Southern city. As students co-created a knowledge base through discussion of their observations in class, students extended the reach of their research. Some students chose to earn extra credit to promote accurate representation of accents from this Southern city by contributing a community accent to the online Visual Accent & Dialect Archive. [15] Discoveries from Service Learning in New Orleans placements inspired in-depth research on New Orleans accents that the *Voice and Speech Review* published as the article, "Yat, Uptown, and Cajun French accents in English", co-authored with Kirby Wahl in 2018. [16] Service Learning increased vocal and physical expressivity and heightened sensitivity to individual and local accents.

4. Conclusion

Service Learners applied voice and movement theories to observation and practice in community agencies in this Southern city. Community-engaged research and experiential learning expanded the students' understanding of how people spoke and moved in this community. Students critically reflected on their own vocal and movement qualities to better understand how their voice and movement choices impacted their peers in class and clients in their individual placements, which further enhanced awareness of diverse vocal and physical choices in this Southern city. As a result, students developed appreciation, compassion, and respect for diverse cultures at this Southern university.

Performing arts in higher education benefits from the application of theory and practice in the community. Service Learning taps into the interests of Millennial students in community engagement. When students observed voice and movement in classroom assignments and observed and coached voice and movement skills in individual placements, students identified similarities and differences between their voice and movement choices and those of community members. This collaborative process encouraged sensitive and respectful application of voice and movement to characters from this Southern city in class and onstage. The community-based agencies benefitted from students' services; students understood how service could benefit the community.

Service Learning creates a bridge from the Ivory Tower to the working world. The High-Impact Practice of Service Learning allows students to bring their acting, voice, and

movement skills to bear in a community setting. When students practice their skills in the real world, they add value to their employability by gaining experience through listening, speaking, moving, and coaching. Community agencies benefit from students who share their skills and knowledge with clients in community programs by increasing their clients' intelligibility and coordination. Service Learning strengthens bonds between the classroom and community by prioritizing movement and voice in higher education. Experiential learning in voice and movement builds performance skills for actors, improves interpersonal communication with community members, enhances the impact of acting significant on higher education, and advances research in the major field. Therefore, this High-Impact Practice makes voice and movement increasingly vital to artistic growth and develops engaged and compassionate global and local citizens.

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