



## Incorporating Service Learning in the Fashion Curriculum

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Service learning is an instructional strategy that utilizes a form of experiential learning and is encouraged on our campus. Faculty, along with students, identify needs in the community and, within the framework of their class objectives, address these problems or issues while simultaneously advancing students' knowledge and skill in their field. In this way, students learn by actively participating in a community project and actively apply course concepts in a real life manner.

An advanced sewing course was identified as a trial course to see if a service learning component would make pedagogical sense. This project followed three objectives of the course, easily marrying the service learning with course content. The three course objectives were:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of mass production garment assembly processes and use of sewing equipment.
2. Demonstrate skill in selecting and combining appropriate fabrics and construction techniques for specialized design projects.
3. Demonstrate an understanding of analyzing completed projects for quality of fabrics and findings.

Students were given options of possible community needs that they could address and the students decided to make hospital gowns for preemies. In order to make this project more meaningful, research literature was found which discussed the needs of the preemie for garments (warmth) as well as the needs of the parents (the act of clothing their infant). It was required that students read the articles before starting the project.

The class created a simple "gown" pattern in two sizes. This pattern had a T shaped back piece and two front pieces. A sample garment was stitched and presented to the class. The students were to analyze the garment, take photos, and write notes. For homework, the students were to make a duplicate garment taking notes of the sequence of operations and bring their garment to the next class.

In the next class, their garments were assigned letters so as to keep them anonymous. The students were required to perform a quality check on at least 5 different gowns. Once they finished, the class as a whole compiled a list of what areas they felt were important (stitch quality, seam depth, type of seam, etc) and analyzed each garment. Through this exercise they realized that as a class they had only reached a 50% quality rate. This really helped the students in determining how to make their final garments better quality.

The class was divided into four groups of 4 – 5 students and each group was given the task of stitching 50 preemie garments (25 in each size). Each group was given the same quantity of fabric and required to create an efficient marker. The groups also had to determine what tasks needed to be done, assign the tasks, work in an assembly line (not individually) and finish the garments in two class periods. They were allowed to work outside of class time if they needed to but they had to work as a team. All the groups finished on time and they all had quality averages of over 95%.

Critical reflection is an important part of the service learning experience. Eyler, Giles and Schmiede (1996) stated that reflection in service learning comes in many forms: continuous, connected, challenging and/or contextualized. Each student wrote a structured, connected reflection of what they learned, linking their learning to the objectives of the course. They were encouraged to take their reflection outside the comfort zone by looking at broader issues that may have come up during the project. Fifteen questions or discussion points were presented to them to think about as they wrote their 3 – 5 page reflection statements. The following are examples of what they wrote:

*“The service I did through this class helped me to see how the course material I learned can be used in everyday life.”*

*“Learning about quality control was an eye opener and this experience helped me to become more aware.”*

*“This project ended up being more of a learning experience than I thought. Just because one does the assignment correctly does not mean one understands the objective and key knowledge that was supposed to be taken from the experience and this helped me link them.”*

*“During this project I learned how important it really is when making a product for a specific customer that has to meet certain standards.”*

*“I am so grateful to have been a part of a project greater than myself.”*

This project was a success in many ways. First of all it met the needs of the course by incorporating three of the required objectives. Secondly, from the comments made in their reflections, the students enjoyed combining their learning with a community service project and that this actually made them care more about what they were doing – their effort was not just for a grade. The students eagerly encouraged the continuation of this project and, due to the success; this class is on track to be officially designated as a service learning course.

Eyler, J., Giles, D.E. & Schmiede. (1996). *A Practitioner's Guide to Reflection in Service-learning: Student Voices and Reflections*. A Technical Assistance Project funded by the Corporation for National Service. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University.