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Quality Standards for Service Learning Activities[ii]

Introduction

Evaluation, auditing, research, best practice, quality, standardization – many terms come up when people talk about quality standards. Most approaches run into similar traps: in order to find the „real" quality and to standardize best practice they neglect that the issue of quality always has been and will be a „running target". Standardizing a running target is like catching a fish with your hands or trying to grow rectangle tomatoes. Especially if quality standards are the basis for benchmarking of SL-activities we should keep in mind that benchmarking is an ongoing process (Hart et al. 2009, 2010; McIlrath et al. 2010).

In contrast to the majority of quality management literature we believe that „good quality" is not only a question of standards, documentation and measurement, but far more a question of applying implicit (tacit) and experiential knowing (Stark 2015): very much the same kind of knowing we want to inspire by offering service learning activities in our universities.

This is why the following quality standards for service learning activities do not aim at standardizing or unifying service learning. Instead, they want to offer that the standard for service learning lies in its inherent diversity and creativity to develop new and innovative formats for experience-based learning (Dewey 1938).

Therefore the quality standards for Service Learning Activities offer

1) Principles of an overall framework for Service Learning activities (REAP)
2) Essentials of Service Learning upon which most authors/scholars agree
3) Minimum Standards („Make Sure that…") which should be met when one designs Service Learning activities based on what practitioners and scholars say what is needed, and
4) Successful Design Patterns which proved to be useful based on practitioner´s experiential wisdom on „What Works" (Miller, Ruda, Stark & Meyer 2015).

The selected indicators for good quality service learning activities are based upon a meta-analysis of more than 20 papers on tools for service learning assessment, rubrics, measurement, design, auditing and evaluation from different continents and countries (UK, Germany, Canada, US, Australia, China). The papers used for this analysis are attached in a list of references.[iii]

They should be continually completed by other and new papers in order not only to develop a repository on the quality of service learning activities, but also to begin a debate about appropriate quality standards and quality development in service learning. Therefore, it is important to note that this paper should be the beginning of an ongoing process both in Europe Engage and the emerging European Service Learning community, and not the result on quality standards for service learning.

Principles of University Public Engagement

The REAP Principles from Bradford University (UK) are describing a well put overall framework of principles on which all Service Learning Activities in HEI should be built (adapted from Pearce & Pearson 2007, page 2).

Reciprocity

There is a flow of knowledge, information and benefits in both directions between the University and its community partners in activities.

Externalities

There are benefits outside of those accruing to the partners and these should contribute to building social trust and social networks in the region and through these to enhanced sustainability, wellbeing and cohesion locally and nationally to the building of a learning and knowledge based society.

Access

Partners have access to University facilities and resources as opposed to receiving a one-off provision of goods/services.

Partnership

Partnerships deepen and develop through the extended reciprocity and improved access. They are an output and outcome of SL activities, which should eventually also become key inputs to improving and enhancing those activities.

The REAP Principles may serve as an overall framework for public engagement of universities and Higher Education Institutions which go beyond service learning and campus community partnerships. REAP Principles also apply for partnerships and collaboration projects between local public institutions or companies.

<u>Essentials</u> of Service Learning Activities

Essentials of Service Learning activities are indicators shared by scholars and practitioners both on a global scale and in different kinds of HEI (Higher Education Institutions like universities, colleges, private/public, teaching/research oriented). Essentials of Service Learning activities should be tried to meet by all means. Therefore, essentials of SL-activities may serve as a ground rule for SL quality. If you fail to meet one or more of the essentials, reasoning is required why you differ from the essential.

Meet Actual Real Needs
Service Learning (SL) meets both real world challenges of the community/relevant community partners and is as well meaningful to student participants.

Link to Curriculum
Service Learning always should be linked to the curriculum/study program of students. This requires active involvement of teachers/academic staff, systematic integration in study programs and the option to be recognized

Facilitate Student Reflection
Service Learning facilitates active, regular and ongoing student reflection guided by teaching personell and/or community partners. Reflection should lead to understand diverse perspectives of challenges

Learning in Real World Settings
The main learning setting in Service Learning is located outside the classroom in real world settings of community partners (schools, community centers or initiatives, other...).

<u>Make Sure That...!</u>
<u>Eleven Minimum Standards</u> for Service Learning Activities

Minimum Standards for Service Learning Activities are based both on research outcomes and requirements most programs for Service Learning in HEI share around the globe. Nevertheless in many Service Learning Activities not all of the requirements may be fully achieved. Therefore the minimum standards also can serve as a <u>guideline of indicators</u> when you are about to design or to evaluate Service Learning Activities. They should be tried to be fulfilled for good quality service learning. All of the indicators can be found in quality standards and self assessment rubrics in many countries.

Always *try to make sure that* Service Learning Activities

1) <u>are meaningful and relevant</u> to persons/institutions and offer opportunities to learn and deepen understanding for all participants (students, faculty and community partners)

2) <u>define goals</u> (reachable and measureable) for each specific Service Learning project

3) <u>meet needs</u> and goals defined by community partners

4) <u>are designed and planned by students</u>/student groups actively collaborating with community partners

5) <u>ensure support and coaching</u> for students both from academic staff and from community partners

6) <u>are linked to the curriculum</u>/study program in an explicit way that learning outcomes can easily be linked to academic theory and methodology both for students and teachers

7) <u>offer adequate time frames</u>[iv] to make experiences and learn in community settings/with community partners in an effective and sustainable way

8) <u>enhance voice and active participation</u> of students and community partners in order promote an active learning process and deeper understanding

9) <u>encourage systematic reflection</u> on learning processes and outcomes for all participants. For students it is important to link their experiences to the theoretical and methodological background of the subject

10) Include evaluation and documentation as integral parts of Service Learning Activities in order to prepare a final presentation of the results evaluated by community partners

11) Assess the overall impact of the Service Learning Activity both for the civic/community partners, the university and the neighborhood/setting

What Works...?
Successful Design Patterns for Service Learning Activities

Successful Design Patterns for Service Learning Activities are based both on research results and on tacit (implicit) knowing in practice. This is an approach based on a pattern language concept (Alexander, Ishikawa and Silverman 1978) used in many disciplines (like architecture, urban planning, software and organizational development) to detect practical wisdom (tacit knowing) crucial for good quality. Tacit knowing based on personal and collective experience is rarely documented. Rather it is distributed by chance in a non-systematic way based on oral history.

In service learning and pedagogy, a systematic development of a pattern language for service learning started recently (Baumgartner 2012; Miller, Ruda & Stark 2015; Stark 2015). In a nation-wide project on Service Learning in HEI in Germany[v], we identified 75 Design Patterns for Service Learning Activities to be relevant to plan, implement, design, conduct and evaluate service learning in HEI (Stark, Miller & Ruda 2015). Design Patterns for Service Learning are written in a specific form (challenge – forces – proposed solution) and can appear in long and short versions. Some of the design patterns for service learning are relevant for the quality of service learning activities in HEI.

As this is an ongoing project and the 75 patterns are written in German, I will present only a few examples for Design Patterns relevant for quality standards[vi]:

Evaluate Transparently

Performance evaluation in Service Learning classes has to meet high requirements: the cooperation with community partners outside the academic world adds more ambigious and different evaluation criteria compared to usual academic evaluation. This can cause some irritation of what will be expected for grading. Therefore it is important to be very clear from the beginning about the methods, performance and results expected and how it will be evaluated.

Self-Organized Project Goals

Instead of offering well prepared projects and exercises in class, in Service Learning it will be more important to discuss goals and values with the community partner. This will help to develop self-organized and customized ideas for service learning projects. To prevent grand and oversized projects, both academic staff and community partners should be prepared to support the student groups towards feasability.

> *Transdisciplinarity*
>
> Most challenges from community partners require more than one academic discipline. If Service Learning Activities bring together students and scholars from many disciplines both learning and service will be more rewarding. Yet, preparing transdisciplinar events requires more time and energy and raises expectations. Therefore, be ready to start early and to calculate more time and effort.

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Annotations:

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[iii] See also https://www.dropbox.com/sh/r1xciy3uo03pen4/AAC7WwHJvqvDCE-ofQl2eD9Ra?dl=0 .

[iv] An adequate time frame may differ from country to country (and sometime even from university to university) because HEI structures still differ widely in Europe. As a reference one can say that most that an overall time less than 60 hours per student in a service learning activity (including field work, theoretical and methodological preparation and reflection) in most cases will not meet the needs of a project oriented setting outside campus.

[v] 'Lernen durch bürgerschaftliches Engagement an Hochschulen' (2012 – 2015), funded by the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth. Participants of the project were Duisburg-Essen University, Augsburg University, Berlin School of Economics and Law, Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg, Social Entrepreneurship Academy Munich and Agentur Mehrwert, Stuttgart.

[vi] Please see the overview of the pattern cards in German:
https://www.dropbox.com/s/q6xcj45v3spg9as/UniDUE_Quartett_InfoBeilage_20150402.pdf?dl=0.