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for Ukraine’s Recovery”

Service-learning Pedagogy for Community Development During Wartime and Recovery

Guidelines



Service-learning Pedagogy for Community Development During Wartime and Recovery Guidelines

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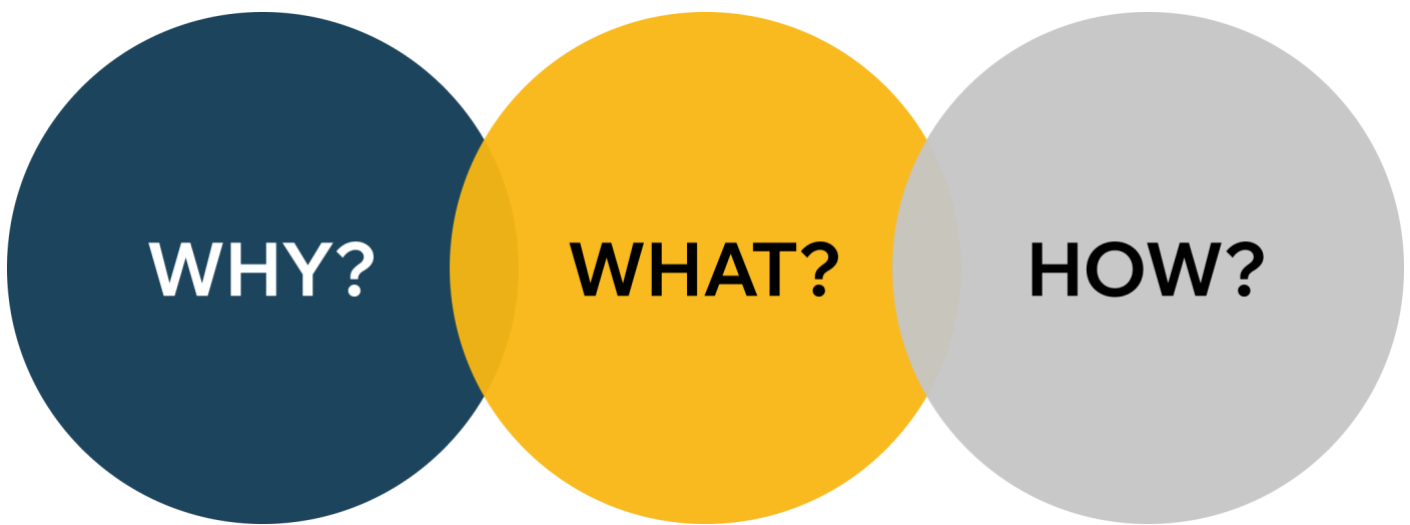
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Ukraine, 2024.

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1. Introduction



WHY?

Why are we discussing Service-learning during wartime? In the face of the critical conditions brought about by war, rethinking the purpose and meaning of academic education becomes even more urgent. The value of implementing Service-learning (SL) in such circumstances lies in its unique capacity to achieve two key objectives. On the one hand, it ensures the continuity of education by providing a deeply practical dimension to academic knowledge. On the other hand, it offers students a heightened sense of purpose and relevance, fostering connections with their communities, enabling them to contribute to positive societal change, and demonstrating the tangible benefits of learning even amidst tragic historical events.

1. Psychological Support

Reflecting on Service-learning experiences aids participants in processing trauma and maintaining engagement in the educational process during crises.

2. Win-Win Strategy

By connecting academic learning with humanitarian action, Service-learning fosters personal growth and societal impact, creating meaningful, authentic learning experiences.

3. Finding Meaning

Service-learning offers students a sense of purpose, helping them navigate the challenges of continuing education in a war context.

WHAT?

The Service-Learning Pedagogy for Community Development During Wartime and Recovery Guidelines aims to promote the Service-learning teaching approach within Ukrainian higher education institutions. Service-learning integrates and harmonises academic knowledge with practical actions designed to address, mitigate, or prevent community challenges. It is carried out in close collaboration with community partners, fostering cooperation and learning. Service-learning is a key expression of the so-called Third Mission of universities, which emphasises civic engagement and social responsibility.

HOW?

The Service-Learning Pedagogy for Community Development During Wartime and Recovery Guidelines aims to equip educators, students, and community leaders with the tools and knowledge needed to navigate the complexities of wartime and post-war education. By strategically applying Service-learning (SL) methodologies, higher education institutions can play a pivotal role in fostering resilience, rebuilding communities, and promoting sustainable development in the face of adversity.

Recognising the unique challenges of implementing Service-learning during wartime, these guidelines provide practical advice on adapting SL practices to both war and post-war contexts. This includes assessing community needs, building strong and sustainable partnerships, designing flexible and impactful curricula, and fostering critical reflection among students. Furthermore, the guidelines outline comprehensive evaluation methods to ensure the effectiveness of SL projects and support their continuous improvement.

2. Understanding the Impact of War on Education During Wartime and Recovery

2.1. Impact of War on Higher Education

The Impact of War on Educational Processes.

The war in Ukraine has severely disrupted education, leaving students without access to necessary resources. Universities, schools, and other educational facilities have become targets of Russian attacks. Historically, universities have been more than incidental casualties of war; they are often deliberate targets due to their societal role in shaping new leaders capable of resisting occupation. Students and faculty frequently play key roles in political struggles, embodying cultural and ethnic identity. Even when not directly targeted, universities suffer from the collateral effects of warfare, with far-reaching consequences for intellectual and cultural life (Waters, 2007).

Challenges to Onsite Learning.

Onsite learning has been significantly hindered by safety concerns. Classes are interrupted by air-raid alarms, with the timing of these alerts often determining whether lessons can continue. Power outages have forced institutions to adapt schedules to align with electricity availability, often shortening breaks and confining lessons to daylight hours. These adjustments, while ensuring material is covered, may compromise the quality of learning and students' ability to absorb information effectively.

Universities' Responses to Wartime Challenges.

Wartime conditions demand flexibility and rapid adaptation from educational institutions (Rega, Honen-Delmar, Hengst, 2024; Elkin et al., 2023; Kenworthy, Opatska, 2023). Universities have adopted various strategies to address these challenges, including:

- **Crisis Management Plans:** Developing comprehensive plans for emergencies, including protocols for communication, evacuation, and collaboration with local authorities and humanitarian agencies. These measures help minimise disruptions to learning.
- **Flexible Scheduling:** Introducing evening, weekend, or asynchronous learning options to accommodate disruptions. Recorded lessons and online materials allow students to study despite power outages or security concerns.

- **Alternative Learning Spaces:** Establishing temporary classrooms in community centres, libraries, or safer locations, or relocating entire institutions to ensure continuity of education.
- **Online Learning:** Leveraging online platforms to enable remote learning, with lessons drawn from the pandemic experience. However, vulnerable groups, including low-income students, still face barriers such as limited access to devices and high-speed internet.
- **Accelerated Degree Programmes:** Offering condensed training programmes to address urgent workforce needs in fields such as healthcare, engineering, and humanitarian aid.
- **International Collaboration and Credit Transfers:** Facilitating partnerships and course transfers to ensure students can continue their education, even if displaced.
- **Emergency Financial Aid:** Providing scholarships and stipends to support students affected by war-related hardships.
- **Mental Health Support:** Expanding counselling services to address the psychological toll of war, including trauma and anxiety, through hotlines, therapy sessions, and increased staff.
- **Community Engagement:** Universities are fostering resilience and trust through service-learning projects, humanitarian initiatives, and partnerships with NGOs and local communities.

These measures, alongside adjustments in research priorities and cross-disciplinary collaboration, demonstrate how universities can play a crucial role in addressing the challenges of wartime education while supporting recovery and sustainable development.

Supporting Students in Coping with the Traumas of War.

Supporting students during wartime is essential to help them continue their education and personal development while mitigating anxiety, stress, and potential post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Thabet, 2014; Benson et al., 2011; Howell, 2014). Effective coping strategies at multiple levels can help students manage these challenges and build resilience (Akgül, 2021).

Academic engagement provides students with a sense of purpose and facilitates social connections, which are critical for self-development (Krypel, 2010). The following strategies can support students in coping with war-related trauma:

1. **Creating a Supportive Environment:** Foster safety and support through families, schools, teachers, and peer groups. Initiatives such as self-help groups and psychotherapy can help students process their experiences and maintain continuity in their personal narratives.
2. **Peer Support Groups:** Bringing together individuals in similar circumstances fosters a social network where shared experiences promote healing and resilience.

3. Engaging in Social Activities: Encourage students to explore hobbies, passions, or service-learning projects to channel their emotions into constructive outlets.

Addressing Post-War Challenges in Education.

To rebuild and adapt higher education in post-war contexts, the following key guidelines provide a practical framework:

1. Assessing Educational Losses

- Impact on Staff: Consider casualties, displacement, or emigration among academic staff.
- Student Demographics: Account for increased enrolment from displaced individuals, war veterans, and first-year students delayed by the conflict.
- Material Damage: Catalogue losses to infrastructure, equipment, and library resources to understand the scale of restoration needed.

2. Restoring Educational Infrastructure

Prioritise rebuilding damaged facilities and integrate digital tools and distance learning to reach displaced students. Service-learning and community engagement projects can supplement physical infrastructure while fostering a sense of belonging.

3. Providing Psychological and Physical Health Support

- Psychological Support: Establish units offering counselling and group therapy to address trauma and stress.
- Physical Well-being: Promote health initiatives to restore a sense of normalcy and support holistic recovery.

4. Adapting Curriculum and Pedagogy

- Revised Programmes: Introduce peace education, conflict resolution, and civic engagement to rebuild social cohesion (Shahab & Ullah, 2021).
- Inclusive Teaching: Implement Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and differentiated instruction to cater to diverse student needs and abilities (Hall et al., 2003; Budnyk et al., 2023).

5. Strengthening University-Community Partnerships

Engage students in Service-learning projects that address community needs, leveraging university resources for technical support and capacity-building initiatives.

6. Enhancing Collaboration

- **Local Communities:** Strengthen grassroots efforts to bridge gaps in education.
- **International Partnerships:** Collaborate with global institutions to share expertise, resources, and best practices, supporting long-term recovery.

7. Promoting Adult Education

- **Lifelong Learning:** Offer programmes that equip adults with skills relevant to post-conflict reconstruction, enhancing employability and social reintegration.
- **Social Cohesion:** Create initiatives that unite diverse groups and rebuild trust in fractured communities.

8. Monitoring and Evaluation

Regular assessment ensures strategies remain responsive to evolving needs. Continuous refinement will strengthen the educational system's role in recovery and development.

By implementing these measures, education can remain a cornerstone of Ukraine's recovery, fostering resilience and laying the foundation for a more sustainable future.

2.2. Empowering Educators During Wartime and Recovery

Teachers are not only responsible for transmitting knowledge to students, but they also support students' physical and mental health and safety, foster communication with parents and the wider community, navigate ideological differences, manage unexpected challenges and reinvent teaching methods to adapt to extreme conditions.

However, authorities and students often forget their emotional, personal and professional needs. Many teachers in conflict-affected regions have been displaced, experienced personal losses, are teaching in occupied areas, and have been subjected to violence (Nenko et al., 2022). Moreover, they grapple with their own anxieties about effectively managing crisis situations, while their teacher training often did not prepare them for it (Girnyk et al., 2018).

Without adequate guidelines, support and motivation, they may be at risk of burnout or mental disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder (Tsybuliak et al., 2023), rendering the educational task challenging to realize and depriving students of a dependable source of support. Female teachers and teachers working with children with special education needs are particularly vulnerable (Velykodna et al., 2023; Tsybuliak et al., 2023).

Given these challenges, it is necessary to prioritize their own needs.

To empower teaching staff, it is important to:

1. Support educators' emotional well-being by

- providing space for teachers to collaborate with each other, with parents and civil society, and to share their own opinions, narratives and ideas and to have the feeling of belonging (Elkin et al., 2023; Kenworthy & Opatska, 2023).
- learning self-care techniques that help both themselves and their students cope with fear together (Santos, 2022; Rybinska et al, 2023).
- considering their specific needs (Anastasia et al., 2022).

2. Promote inclusive, student-centered and participative methods

For example using differentiation techniques (Struyven et al., 2019) or offering remedial online and offline courses and material resources, tutoring and monitoring programs for students who have lost content, and giving teachers access to various instructional materials or training teachers in student-centered and participative teaching and evaluation methods, such as problem-based Service-learning (Aker et al., 2022), and providing lesson plans tailored to these approaches are essential to alleviating teachers' workloads.

3. Facilitate the integration of technology and digital skills

Access to technology, synchronous and asynchronous digital learning methods, and proficiency in digital learning skills have become crucial for continuing education (Banyoi, 2023; Semerikov, 2023; Ovcharuk, 2024). Moreover, it is important to consider that students will have different digital skill levels and access to technology. Therefore, differentiation of the

technological tools available and accessibility are of crucial importance not to exclude more vulnerable students (Kravchenko, 2023).

4. Support educators to address conflict, prejudice and injustice

It is essential to open space for them to understand the war context and to learn to deal with students and parents who might have different ideological beliefs, as well as offer them tools to help older students and adults learn to filter true and false information, developing critical thinking and peacebuilding skills (Filho et al., 2020; Rudolph & Tan, 2022). Therefore, teachers will require identity-based educational training and support in developing their own critical and student-centred pedagogies. In this context, it is necessary to allow for curriculum flexibility so that teachers can choose how to deliver knowledge in ways that fit their own values.

5. Facilitate access to up-to-date information

This includes also the information about where to shelter, safety protocols and evacuation exercises in case of air raids, about planned or unexpected power outages and other supply disruptions, trainings in first-aid, access to emergency kits (Omelchuk et al., 2022; Santos, 2022). Information about students' backgrounds is also necessary for teachers to adapt their classes to their different needs. Information about the good practices being done in other educational institutions (Nenko, 2022), NGOs (Elkin et al., 2023) or services offered by university libraries in wartime (Kolesnykova, 2023). When implementing Service-learning, special attention should be given to tools that enable educators to access information about the community's needs and current projects happening in the region. This will contribute to building their social capital and will facilitate the adaptation of knowledge content in ways that can truly impact the community.



*photo from the Ukrainian Catholic University

3. Understanding the Service-learning Methodology

3.1. Principles of the Service-learning Methodology

What is Service-learning?

Service-learning is a pedagogical approach that integrates community engagement with academic teaching and learning objectives, addressing both educational and societal needs (Compare et al., 2022). It aligns with the concept of “pedagogies of cooperation and solidarity” (UNESCO, 2021), fostering learning that occurs in and with the world while aiming to improve it. This approach emphasises interconnectedness, highlighting the shared challenges and systemic dependencies that link us to one another and the planet.

Key Elements of Service-learning

1. **Solidarity Service:** Responds to authentic community needs through meaningful, practical, and impactful activities. It demands responsibility and commitment from participants.
2. **Student Agency:** Encourages learners to discover their potential and recognise how their actions shape and are shaped by the social reality they inhabit.
3. **Curricular Integration:** Links service activities directly to academic content, allowing students to apply knowledge from a wide range of disciplines, from arts to sciences, in real-world contexts.
4. **Critical Reflection:** Transforms experiences into profound learning opportunities. Reflection is both a process—interpreting the experience—and a product—the insights gained from it.
5. **Active Participation:** Builds a sense of community and enhances both self-efficacy (belief in personal success) and collective efficacy (group belief in its shared abilities to achieve goals).

Designing Service-learning

The design of Service-learning follows three core phases: preparation, implementation, and closure (Fiorin, 2016). Each phase is tailored to suit the unique needs of the specific context.

1. Preparation Phase

This initial phase involves:

- **Motivation:** Encourages students to adopt a proactive role by presenting them with a meaningful challenge.
- **Diagnosis:** Identifies the problem to be addressed, exploring its complexities and laying the groundwork for an informed response (Tapia et al., 2015).
- **Ideation:** Develops a structured plan that integrates service and learning objectives. A well-crafted design provides clear indicators for evaluating how effectively the project addresses the problem and aligns with students' disciplinary competencies (Tapia, 2006).

The EIS Postgraduate School (Educare all'Incontro e alla Solidarietà) at LUMSA University in Rome has developed tools, such as design templates, to help students structure Service-learning projects while identifying potential gaps in their approach (Culcasi et al., 2022a).

Through these stages, Service-learning fosters meaningful engagement, bridging academic goals with community development in a way that benefits both students and society.

Questions	Item	Your answer
What are the goals and expected outcomes?	Main aims of the project	
What is the purpose of the project? Which is the social need?	Motivation of the project	
To whom is the project addressed? Is there a specific group we will be dealing with or is our service aimed at the whole community? Try to identify as specifically as possible the target group of the project.	Target of the project	
What is to be done? What actions/activities do we need to do in order to achieve the desired outcomes? Define concretely what	Definition of the service activities	

you will do to achieve the project objectives.		
With whom do we carry out the project? Who will we involve in the project? Will we work with any organizations or associations in the area?	Participants	
What specific expertise can you bring to the project? Does your university career provide you with specific skills? Do you have a passion that can be useful?	Definition of your expertise	
<p>What are the soft skills you need in order to achieve results? And why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → social skills (ability to work in a team, to communicate, to negotiate, to manage conflicts) → personal skills (ability to lead, self-evaluate, be flexible and adaptive) → methodological skills (ability to solve problems, analyze information and data, train independently, be creative and innovate) → digital skills (ability to communicate digitally, to create digital content, to solve digital digital problems) 	Transversal/life/soft skills	
What resources are needed to implement the project? (materials, number of people etc.)	Human and material resources	

How do you ensure that your interventions work synergistically and not antagonistically? How do you include vulnerable communities in your actions? Did you consider the unintended impacts of your actions on vulnerable communities?	Principles: equity and coherence	
Can we make it? What obstacles might we encounter along the way? How do we foresee them being resolved?	Project resilience	
What do you want to achieve and by when? Outline a list of 3-5 milestones along your expected timeline indicating quantitative & qualitative indicators.	Results and indicators	
How will you communicate the impact your project has had/is having?	GloCal community	

Table 1: Student Service-learning Design Sheet Source: Culcasi et al. (2022a)

2. The Implementation Phase consists of solidarity activities' execution:

it is important that the service be structured according to a time frame sufficient to make it a meaningful experience from both a learning and social impact perspective. Facing external circumstances and the associated unforeseeable contingencies may force project participants to revise and adapt what was originally planned.

3. The Closing Phase consists of the Service-learning celebration:

a final reflection on the experience is carried out, in terms of learning and service goals achieved. An open community meeting day could be organised to celebrate the outcomes of the experience, to recognise themselves as part of a community and to thank the efforts and commitment of all those involved.

3.2. Exploring e-Service-learning

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, technology-mediated Service-learning has become widespread in its application: e-Service-learning (e-SL). The qualitative transformation of SL to e-SL is still an open issue, lacking in many contexts teaching resources and teacher training on how to effectively structure instructional processes and support community organisations in innovation through the digital medium (Culcasi et al., 2023).

Waldner et al. (2012) identified a total of five Service-learning types, including three hybrid models, classified according to the “place”—in-person or online— where the instruction and service components occur (see Figure 1).

	Traditional SL	e-SL Hybrid Type I	e-SL Hybrid Type II	e-SL Hybrid Type III	Extreme e-SL
Service component	In-person	In-person	Online	Blended	Online
Instruction component	In-person	Online	In-person	Blended	Online

Figure 1: Service-learning types. Source: Waldner et al. (2012), adapted from Culcasi et al. (2022b)

Considering these five Service-learning types, Culcasi et al. (2022b) modelization considers the different roles played by technology and digital devices in (e)-SL, while also considering the students’ level of digital, personal, and social skills. Specifically, their study suggests a categorisation based on four types of technological interaction, from the least to the most complex (Figure 2: Culcasi et al., 2022b):

1. Instrumental channel-type: technology is the medium to implement the Service-learning project when, if it weren’t for a state of necessity, it would not have been used. As such, the students do not need any particular technological expertise, while their personal and social skills are paramount.
2. Integrated channel-type: technology remains a medium, but its inclusion results from an intentional design decision. As such, it requires students to be digitally literate to provide the service.
3. Instrumental objective-type: technology is the goal for Service-learning; it requires students to implement existing ICT tools in the community service but does not involve the creation of new technological tools.
4. Integrated objective-type: technology is the objective of the Service-learning project and includes creating new digital tools. Thus, students need advanced technological skills, while their personal and social skills may be minimal.

TYPES OF TECHNOLOGICAL INTERACTION

ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN E-SL

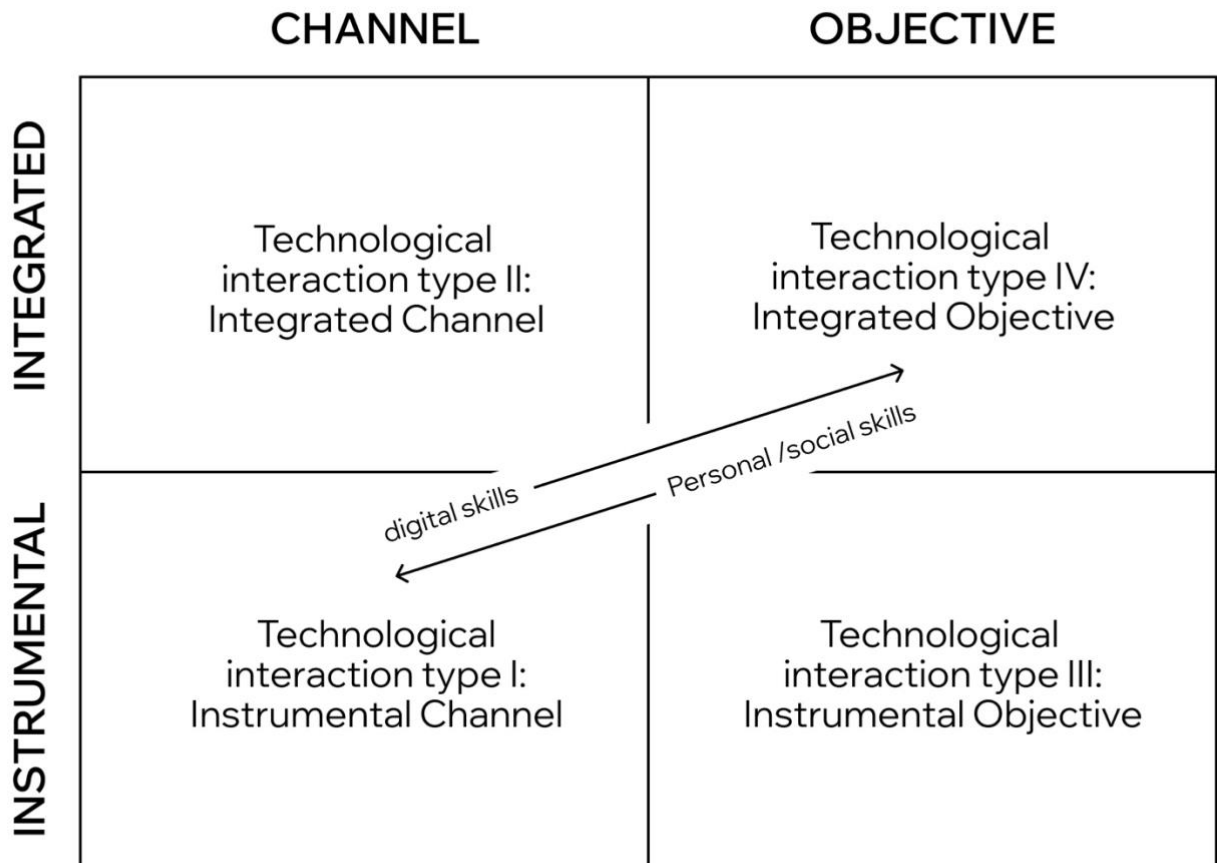


Figure 2: Modelization of the technological Interaction types in e-SL. Source: Culcasi et al. (2022b)

It is interesting to notice that, although the present model has been proposed during the pandemic, it still works in a post-pandemic phase, leading to potential new paths of Service-learning application and offering schools and higher education institutions a new frame seeking to foster meaningful engagement, collaborative learning, and impactful community involvement through technology.

3.3. Principles of Peacebuilding Education, Civic Engagement, and Citizenship

How Are Peacebuilding Education, Civic Engagement, and Citizenship Connected to Service-learning?

Service-learning aligns with the goals of peacebuilding education and civic engagement by fostering empathy, community collaboration, and active citizenship (Paffenholz & Spurk, 2006). These aims are deeply rooted in the broader objectives of global education, which emphasise:

- Recognising one's role in a global society,
- Making informed decisions with an awareness of consequences,
- Developing judgement based on analysis and empathy, and
- Engaging in responsible community participation.

The competencies associated with global education resonate with the principles of peace curricula, providing a foundation for integrating Service-learning into both general education and specific disciplines (Haffar & Crenshaw, 2013).

Applying the Principles

Inclusivity and Diversity

Service-learning must embrace inclusivity by addressing ethnic, cultural, religious, gender, and socioeconomic diversity. Ensuring participants can connect projects with their passions and skills fosters a sense of belonging and engagement. Partnerships with diverse communities enrich understanding and promote cross-cultural solidarity (Guerra-Sua, 2019; Baú, 2016).

Key strategies include:

- Cultural competency training: Topics like implicit bias and effective communication across differences enhance awareness and understanding.
- Reflective practices: Encourage participants to critically examine their biases and assumptions.
- Intergroup dialogues: Provide safe spaces for discussions about diversity, equity, and social justice.
- Accessible environments: Ensure accommodations for disabilities, multilingual resources, and safe, welcoming venues.

Critical Thinking and Dialogue

Structured reflection and open dialogue deepen participants' understanding of societal challenges. Activities should:

- Encourage analysis of personal experiences and societal complexities.
- Foster constructive debates on controversial topics such as inequality or environmental sustainability.
- Provide resources like case studies or readings to support critical evaluation and connections to service activities.

Conflict Resolution and Mediation

Conflict resolution is vital in Service-learning, equipping participants to navigate challenges collaboratively. Skills such as active listening, empathy, and negotiation are developed through:

- Role-playing and case studies: Simulate real-life conflicts to practise problem-solving.
- Mediation training: Teach facilitation techniques for fostering understanding and reconciliation.
- Guided reflection: Analyse experiences to enhance conflict management strategies.

Human Rights and Social Justice

Service-learning fosters an understanding of systemic inequalities and promotes equitable solutions. By addressing issues such as poverty, discrimination, and gender inequality, participants:

- Collaborate with communities to co-create solutions.
- Engage in advocacy and policy initiatives to promote justice.
- Reflect on ethical implications and power dynamics to deepen their commitment to human rights.

Active Participation and Youth Empowerment

Civic Engagement:

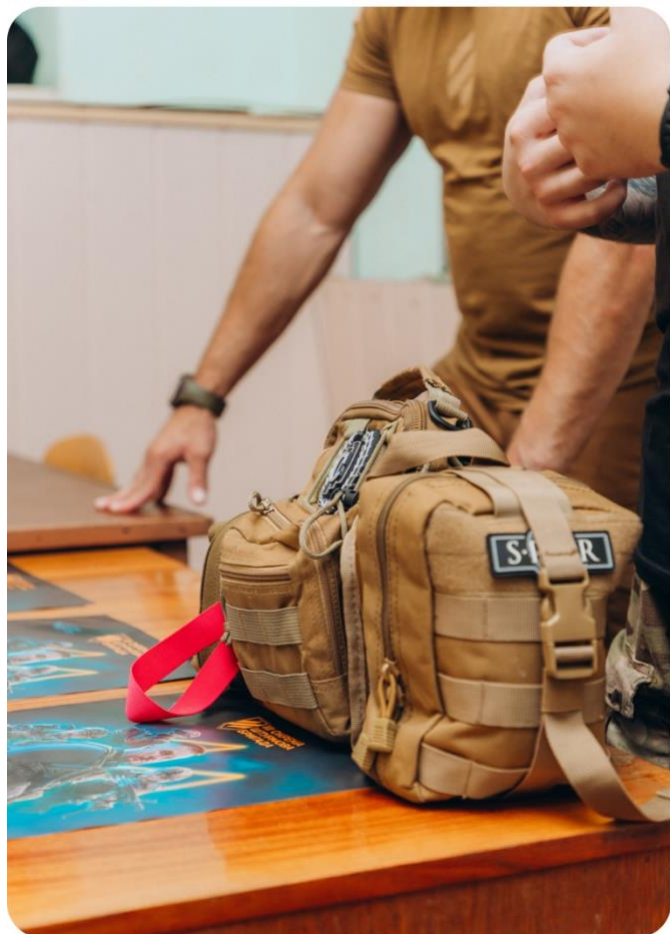
Service-learning cultivates lifelong social responsibility by engaging participants in meaningful community activities. Partnerships with stakeholders and hands-on projects highlight the value of collective action. Participants develop critical skills such as leadership, advocacy, and problem-solving.

Youth Leadership:

Young people are key drivers of social change. Service-learning empowers youth by:

- Providing leadership opportunities and mentorship,
- Encouraging innovative problem-solving, and
- Encouraging inspiring collaboration across generations.

By fostering empathy, creativity, and agency, Service-learning equips participants to address pressing challenges and contribute to a more equitable and sustainable future.



*photo from NTU "Dnipro Polytechnic"

4. Understanding the Impact of War on Service-learning

Service-learning is a powerful educational tool, fostering connection, purpose, and engagement between students, educators, and communities (Kenworthy & Opatska, 2023). In wartime, the redefinition of societal priorities amplifies its significance, addressing urgent needs, fostering care, and supporting community welfare. Below, key ways war affects the implementation of Service-learning are outlined:

1. Disrupted Education Systems

War often leads to the closure of schools and universities, the destruction of infrastructure, and displacement of students and educators, hindering Service-learning projects reliant on stable institutions and resources.

2. Shifting Community Needs

Service-learning initiatives must adapt to rapidly changing priorities, such as immediate survival needs, security, psychosocial support, and reconstruction, ensuring relevance and responsiveness to war-affected communities.

3. Loss of Community Networks

The breakdown of social cohesion and trust in war-affected areas makes it challenging to establish partnerships and assess local needs effectively.

4. Political and Legal Constraints

Political instability and legal uncertainties during wartime—such as movement restrictions or licensing challenges—can complicate project implementation and participant safety.

5. Economic Devastation

The economic fallout of war, including poverty and inflation, reduces funding and community capacity to engage in and benefit from Service-learning initiatives.

6. Ethical Considerations

Service-learning in war zones necessitates ethical vigilance, prioritising participant safety, avoiding harm, respecting local agency, and adhering to strict ethical guidelines.

7. Trauma and Reconciliation

Projects must address long-term psychological and social trauma, contributing to reconciliation and peacebuilding while being sensitive to the enduring effects of conflict.

8. Condensed Planning Timelines

Wartime urgency necessitates streamlined project planning, prioritising efficiency and immediate impact while balancing education and service.

9. Enhanced Student Motivation

Exposure to the hardships of war often heightens students' empathy and commitment, inspiring meaningful participation in Service-learning efforts to address pressing issues.

10. Engaging with Despair

Service-learning must account for emotional challenges such as tension and hopelessness. Strategies like incorporating art, offering rest spaces, and frequent breaks help manage psychological strain.

Adapting Service-Learning to Wartime Conditions

Key Participants

Students, educators, and community representatives must consider personal trauma when collaborating. Educators and university management play vital roles in ensuring safety, promoting Service-learning, and addressing physical, informational, and reputational risks.

Shifting the Balance of Service and Learning

Wartime conditions may increase the emphasis on "service" over "learning." While this ensures immediate results, maintaining an educational focus is crucial to preserve the initiative's dual purpose.

Designing Effective Projects

Faculty should consider how their disciplines can address societal needs and transform existing community engagement into Service-learning pathways.

Questions the faculty member can ask before designing the Service-learning project:

1. How can the discipline I teach serve the society in this specific context?
2. How can I work on the discipline I teach in such a way that students put it into practice and become active agents of positive impact?
3. What forms of social involvement does my university pursue that can be turned into Service-learning pathways?

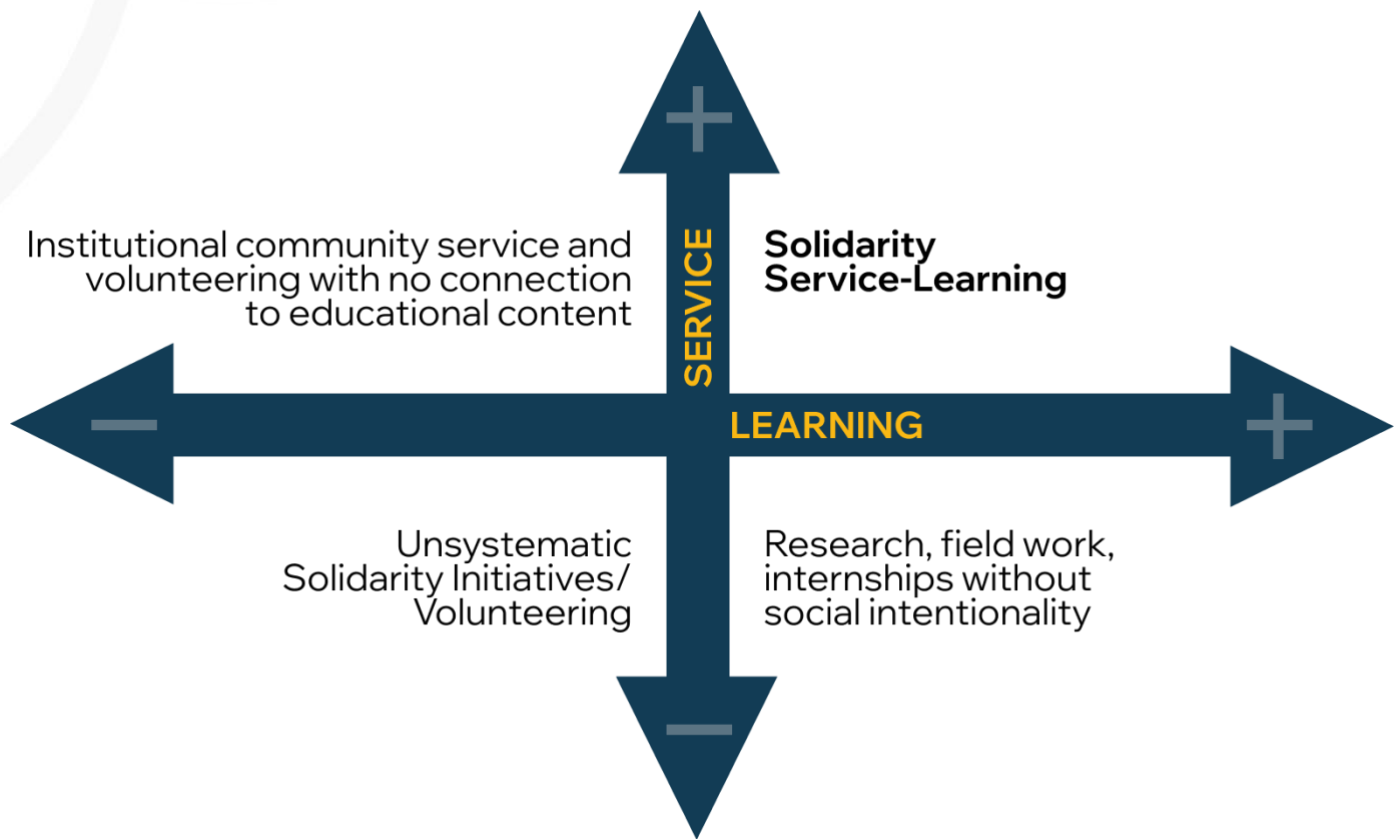


Figure 3: Service-learning Quadrant. Source: Adaptation of the quadrants published by Service-learning 2000 Center, Stanford University, California, 1996. See: Tapia, 2006: 26; CLAYSS, 2013.

Usually, the process of implementing a Service-learning project runs through 5 stages (Regina, 2017, Tapia, 2006). These stages take the form and duration of who goes through them depending on the context and the needs of the actors involved. Each stage may also be affected by war conditions.

STAGES OF SERVICE-LEARNING IN WARTIME

STAGE 1. MOTIVATION.

In peacetime, motivation typically involves demonstrating to students the value of transitioning from traditional academic training to Service-learning for their personal growth and societal impact. In wartime, however, Service-learning also serves as a crucial incentive for students to remain engaged in education, highlighting its immediate relevance and usefulness for both personal development and contributing meaningfully to their current context.

STAGE 2. DIAGNOSIS.

Wartime conditions often preclude long-term, in-depth assessments of needs. However, the urgency of humanitarian demands often makes extensive studies unnecessary. Direct requests from public partners, media reports, and personal observations can serve as effective means of identifying priorities. At this stage, it is equally important to evaluate the university's capacity to address these needs, considering both its material resources and academic expertise.

STAGE 3. PROJECT DESIGN AND PLANNING.

When planning a project, it is vital to prioritise safety, consider the impact on beneficiaries, and maintain a balance between education and service. Communication with public partners should incorporate their input while emphasising the educational objectives and alignment with the semester plan. Key details should be formalised in a contract or memorandum of cooperation.

Given the unpredictability of war, it may not always be feasible to plan semester-long projects. Instead, the initial academic period during hostilities can focus on short-term initiatives or other forms of community engagement, which can later evolve into comprehensive Service-learning projects.

STAGE 4. IMPLEMENTATION.

Even with thorough planning, implementing Service-learning projects in wartime always carries the risk of partial or complete disruption due to sudden changes. While it is advisable to have contingency plans, if implementation becomes impossible, time can be redirected to reflection with students. This allows for analysing foreseeable and unforeseen risks, exploring ways to maintain contact with social partners, and planning future adaptations of the project.

STAGE 5. CLOSURE AND MULTIPLICATION.

Project debriefing is crucial, particularly in wartime, as community needs often change rapidly, expand unexpectedly, or diminish. It is essential to assess whether the project can be repeated or adapted for use in other educational institutions. While many wartime projects may be one-off initiatives due to shifting demands, others can be sustained and repeated until the need for them no longer exists.

Cross-Cutting Processes

→ Reflection

Encourage ongoing reflection to address emotional challenges and adapt to external changes.

→ Documentation and Communication

Systematically record processes to preserve knowledge, counter misinformation, and develop scalable solutions for future crises.

Through flexibility, ethical practices, and a focus on both immediate and long-term goals, Service-learning can remain a transformative educational approach even in the most challenging contexts.



*photo from Sumy State University

5. Adapting Service-learning to War and Post-War Conditions: Practical Guidelines

5.1. Assess Needs and Context

Understanding Student Needs

In conflict-affected and protracted crises, education serves as a beacon of hope, fostering peace and a better future (Pherali, 2019). As highlighted by Cogorno et al. (2023), understanding how students navigate their decision to continue or suspend studies in such contexts is pivotal. During wartime, education must adhere to the 4As (Pherali, 2023):

1. Available: Supported by necessary infrastructure and free of barriers.
2. Accessible: Inclusive of marginalised groups.
3. Acceptable: Culturally appropriate, equitable, and meaningful.
4. Adaptable: Responsive to the unique challenges of students in crises.

Maintaining educational engagement offers students a goal-oriented framework that fosters resilience and hope (Fadhli et al., 2022). A sense of community through shared academic challenges helps students feel less isolated (Cogorno et al., 2023), while opportunities for leadership and altruistic involvement strengthen their emotional well-being (Sánchez-Teruel et al., 2021). Educators play a crucial role by fostering environments where students apply their strengths and reflect on their potential, cultivating a student-centred approach to learning.

Understanding Community Needs

Post-conflict communities face varying degrees of destruction and resource constraints.

Needs typically prioritise:

1. Humanitarian Assistance: Immediate provision of essentials like food, water, shelter, and medical care.
2. Governance and Institutional Restoration: Rebuilding effective, transparent administrative systems, including policing and judicial mechanisms.

Longer-term priorities include:

1. Rebuilding infrastructure.
2. Restoring healthcare services.

3. Addressing educational losses and developing skills.
4. Economic recovery and job creation.
5. Promoting social cohesion and reconciliation.
6. Reviving cultural and recreational activities.

Communities hosting large numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) often face added challenges such as resource strain, social tensions, and disrupted livelihoods. Addressing these issues requires promoting economic opportunities, equitable access to services, and fostering integration between IDPs and host communities.

Identifying Strengths and Resources

In war contexts, leveraging the strengths of students, communities, and stakeholders is essential. Diverse perspectives enrich Service-learning projects, fostering motivation and ensuring effectiveness. Partnerships should be mutually beneficial, valuing local knowledge and resources to make projects meaningful and impactful.

Key Questions for Needs Assessment:

- Service: What are the community's immediate needs? What resources exist, and how can students help bridge gaps?
- Education: Do the project objectives align with course goals? What will students learn, and why is it important?
- Activities: Are planned actions feasible? Should additional partners, such as local authorities or public organisations, be involved?

Contextual Awareness

Students and teachers must grasp the historical, social, and political roots of the conflict and its aftermath. This includes understanding displaced communities, exacerbated inequalities, and reconstruction needs such as infrastructure repair and reintegration of combatants. Engaging local experts—academics, journalists, and humanitarian organisations—can help contextualise Service-learning projects, ensuring their relevance and impact.

Reflecting on Privileges

Power dynamics and institutional hierarchies can affect project outcomes. Reflecting on one's privileges fosters non-authoritarian relationships and helps mitigate risks associated with hierarchical power structures.

Prioritising Needs

Service-learning projects should address urgent community needs while considering available resources. A prioritisation list, focusing on short-term goals for immediate survival, ensures projects are both relevant and achievable.

Ensuring Safety

Safety is paramount. Universities should establish crisis management plans, including protocols for evacuation, communication, and emergency aid. These measures, coupled with contingency plans for teaching continuity, minimise disruption during wartime.

Evaluating Risks

Key questions include:

1. Are measures physically, psychologically, and legally safe?
2. Can risks be mitigated, and is the community partner reliable?
3. How will unforeseen risks impact project goals, and what alternatives exist?

Engaging Communities and Stakeholders

Drafting a preliminary project plan and consulting with stakeholders ensures accountability and alignment with community needs. Tools such as surveys, interviews, and focus groups can provide ongoing feedback.

Documenting and Sharing Findings

In wartime, systematic documentation supports transparency, counters misinformation, and facilitates collaboration. Student outputs can serve as public-facing resources, helping disseminate knowledge and accelerate future projects.

By addressing these factors, Service-learning projects can remain relevant, impactful, and sustainable in the complex dynamics of war and post-war recovery.

5.2. Building Community Partnership During Wartime and Recovery

Develop Horizontal Relationships

A fundamental principle of the Service-learning process is the creation of horizontal relationships, free from hierarchical superiority. In conflict contexts, authoritarian relationships often emerge through violence, fostering fear and despair among affected populations. It is crucial that Service-learning projects do not replicate these dynamics, as doing so risks undermining trust and the success of the initiative.

Participants should be aware of the trauma and vulnerability faced by their partners and must actively avoid interactions that provoke fear or shame, which can lead to dishonesty or compliance driven by self-preservation. Non-violent communication techniques and informal opportunities for interaction are essential to cultivating genuine, collaborative relationships.

Promote Intercultural Understanding

Transparent and consistent communication is vital during both wartime and recovery to align strategies effectively and build trust among stakeholders. Sensitivity to the historical traumas experienced by individuals and communities is indispensable for fostering mutual respect. Cultural exchange programmes between students and community members can play a pivotal role in dismantling stereotypes and fostering empathy.

Create Inclusive Partnerships

Engaging a diverse range of community representatives ensures that the perspectives and voices of different groups are heard. This inclusive approach empowers communities to take active roles in decision-making processes, fostering a sense of ownership and resilience in recovery efforts. Continuous learning and adaptation are key to navigating the dynamic challenges of conflict and post-conflict environments. Regular monitoring and evaluation of strategies enable responsiveness and promote long-term organisational learning.

Maintain a Clear and Common Purpose

Establishing clear objectives and securing the commitment of all stakeholders is essential for the success of partnerships in complex wartime and recovery settings. Universities and communities must collaborate to identify the most urgent needs and determine how academic expertise can best contribute. Formalising these partnerships through Memorandums of

Understanding (MOUs) can provide a framework for shared goals, responsibilities, and expectations, ensuring clarity and accountability.

Communicate Effectively

In wartime, effective communication becomes critical for fostering cooperation and addressing rapidly changing circumstances. Regular, transparent communication with students and project partners is essential to adapt to external changes and address the evolving psychological states of participants. Consistent dialogue allows for real-time reflection, ensuring timely and appropriate responses to challenges.

Build Capacity and Plan for Sustainable Stakeholder Engagement

Capacity-building workshops are invaluable for equipping community members with specific skills and knowledge, enabling them to take active roles in their own development. These workshops provide a platform for sharing best practices, discussing challenges, and generating innovative solutions.

The focus should remain on empowering communities to address their own challenges sustainably, with universities serving as facilitators and knowledge providers rather than top-down authorities. Long-term stakeholder engagement strategies should prioritise the development of local capacities, ensuring that communities can continue to grow and recover independently once external support is no longer available.

5.3. Designing a Meaningful Curriculum: Adjusted for War and Post-War Contexts

Define Learning Objectives

In the dynamic contexts of war and post-war recovery, learning objectives must reflect the challenges and opportunities of these environments. This requires a robust system for continuous monitoring and evaluation to ensure that the curriculum remains relevant to the evolving realities of peacebuilding, humanitarian efforts, and community resilience.

To stay informed, educators should maintain connections with frontline organisations, experts, and networks, allowing the curriculum to respond to emerging needs effectively. Flexibility is key; modular structures and adaptable resources ensure the curriculum can be quickly revised in response to changing circumstances. Scenario-based activities and real-world case studies should be incorporated to simulate the dilemmas faced in conflict and recovery, enabling students to develop critical thinking and practical problem-solving skills.

Learning objectives should integrate local cultural assets, traditions, and values while addressing sensitivities and trauma. This can be achieved by conducting cultural audits and needs assessments to understand the community context deeply. Including indigenous knowledge, local languages, and historical narratives makes the curriculum more relevant and meaningful, fostering a sense of ownership among learners. Collaborative partnerships with local practitioners and organisations can provide invaluable insights, enhancing interdisciplinarity and community relevance.

Define Service Objectives

In conflict and recovery contexts, service objectives should be tailored to address immediate and long-term community needs. Tools such as surveys, interviews, focus groups, and self-assessments must be designed with cultural and linguistic sensitivity, ensuring accessibility for diverse audiences. Effective service objectives should promote trust and collaboration, empowering communities to actively shape their recovery while aligning with broader peacebuilding efforts.

Choose Your Content

Content selection should prioritise skills and knowledge most relevant to wartime and post-war realities. This includes balancing theory with practical application, integrating examples from conflict zones, and focusing on topics such as trauma-informed practices, conflict resolution, and community rebuilding. Content should also reflect local histories and lived experiences to enhance engagement and relevance.

Integrate Peacebuilding Skills

Peacebuilding skills like critical thinking, leadership, and conflict resolution are essential in war-affected contexts. Learning activities should provide opportunities for hands-on practice, such as simulations, role-playing, and internships with humanitarian organisations. These activities should mirror real-world challenges, helping students connect theoretical knowledge with practical application. Highlighting the transferability of skills across contexts fosters adaptability and lifelong learning.

Promote Diversity and Inclusion

War and post-war settings often exacerbate inequalities. A diverse curriculum that includes voices from different cultural, ethnic, and gender perspectives is crucial. This can be achieved by integrating authors and case studies from non-European traditions, using inclusive imagery, and ensuring the curriculum reflects the diversity of student and community populations. Creating a safe and inclusive learning environment enhances student well-being and supports equitable recovery efforts.

Adapt Learning Methods to Students' Needs

Understanding the specific needs, strengths, and aspirations of students affected by war is critical. These learners may have experienced trauma or disruptions in their education. Tailored learning approaches, such as flexible pacing, trauma-informed pedagogies, and alternative assessment methods, ensure that students remain engaged and supported throughout their education.

Align Content with Objectives

The curriculum must align with both the institution's values and the community's recovery goals. Collaboration with external stakeholders, such as NGOs and community groups, ensures the curriculum addresses real-world needs while preparing students for meaningful contributions to society.

Review and Iterate

Regular curriculum reviews, informed by feedback from students, community members, and stakeholders, are essential in adapting to changing conditions. Transparent decision-making processes and inclusive participation enhance the curriculum's responsiveness and impact.

Engage the Community

Community engagement is vital for designing a curriculum relevant to local needs. Stakeholder analyses can help identify key contributors, while diverse communication channels—such as workshops, forums, and online platforms—ensure broad participation. Providing resources and training for stakeholders empowers them to play an active role in curriculum development. Feedback loops and recognition of contributions further strengthen these partnerships.

Use Alternative Assessment Tools

Assessment methods should be designed to gather meaningful insights from students and community members, fostering collaboration and innovation. Tools like workshops, open forums, and online platforms create spaces for dialogue, while transparent processes ensure trust and accountability.

Promote Interdisciplinarity

Interdisciplinary approaches are particularly valuable in addressing the multifaceted challenges of war and recovery. Collaborative design teams should create integrated learning experiences that connect disciplines and address real-world problems. Guest speakers, field trips, and community-based projects can deepen students' understanding of interdisciplinary applications.

Create an Adaptable Curriculum

Given the unpredictability of war contexts, the curriculum must be adaptable, allowing for flexibility in methods and outcomes. Imagining difficult scenarios and preparing contingency plans ensures resilience. Lifelong skills, such as adaptability and reflection, should be integrated, preparing students to navigate complex and changing environments.

Be Creative When Planning Activities

In war-affected areas, educational activities must serve both learning and community needs. For example, students could create practical outputs like online tutorials, addressing community challenges while demonstrating their knowledge. This approach fosters a sense of purpose and directly benefits local populations, reinforcing the connection between education and community empowerment.

5.4. Be Prepared to Be Flexible and Adaptable

Effective planning is usually the foundation of successful project implementation. This is particularly true in Service-learning projects, where thorough preparation underpins each stage. However, real-world circumstances often deviate from expectations, especially during times of war and recovery.

Anticipate Challenges

In the current context of Ukraine, challenges may arise from various factors:

- Security concerns: Safety is a predominant issue that can significantly impact collaboration.
- Ethical challenges: These are particularly sensitive during partnerships with territorial communities and may require careful navigation to uphold integrity and fairness.
- Ideological differences: While less frequent at the community level, these should be identified and addressed proactively to mitigate potential conflicts.
- Logistical obstacles: Issues such as transportation, infrastructure, and resource availability can heavily influence the feasibility of cooperation with communities.

Start Small with Medium- or Short-Term Goals

Begin with a manageable project to build confidence and establish a foundation for future initiatives.

- Collaborate with students and community partners to formulate a Plan B. This contingency plan should outline alternative actions if unforeseen circumstances make the original plan unviable. Activities such as document drafting, consulting, designing, or data analysis can often be conducted separately or remotely.
- Clearly discuss and agree on communication methods, including remote options. Refer to the section on e-Service-learning for further guidance.

Emphasise Sustainability

A significant risk in Service-learning projects is the possibility of high initial enthusiasm tapering off, leading to unfinished work. To mitigate this:

- Prepare students to value the process as much as the outcome. Activities like discussion, planning, and designing interaction frameworks are invaluable for both educational and service objectives.
- Stress that even if a project cannot be fully completed, the groundwork laid can serve as a blueprint for future implementation under more favourable conditions.

Prioritise Physical and Psychological Safety

Safety—both physical and psychological—is paramount:

- Be prepared to terminate the project partially or entirely if circumstances compromise the well-being of participants.
- Monitor participants' psychological responses to their involvement. Be alert to signs of distress, such as over-identification with the challenges of the project, and adjust participation accordingly.

Foster Transparent and Collaborative Communication

Maintaining open lines of communication with all participants is crucial for shared decision-making and adaptability. By working together, even unexpected outcomes can contribute to the overall success of the project.

When communicating, adhere to the following principles:

- Informed consent: Ensure that all participants fully understand the purpose, risks, and benefits of their involvement.
- Transparency and accountability: Communicate openly and establish mechanisms to ensure responsible resource use.
- Dialogue and understanding: Foster open dialogue to address differing perspectives and build mutual trust.
- Focus on common ground: Highlight shared values and objectives to unite stakeholders around the project's goals.
- Neutral stance: Maintain neutrality on politically sensitive issues, promoting tolerance and respect for diversity within the community.

By embracing flexibility and adaptability, you can navigate challenges effectively, ensuring that the Service-learning project remains meaningful and impactful, even under challenging circumstances.

5.5. Encourage Critical Reflection in the Context of War and Recovery

Critical reflection is one of the most essential elements of Service-learning, as it bridges the gap between 'service' and 'learning' (Hatcher & Bringle, 1997). In the context of war and recovery, reflection assumes an even greater significance by addressing the complexity of responding to crises, navigating ethical dilemmas, and fostering sustainable social change. Reflection enables participants to continuously evaluate the impacts of their actions, both immediate and long-term, on students, teachers, and the community. It ensures that projects remain aligned with broader goals of justice, reconstruction, and resilience, which must guide all stages of a Service-learning initiative (Vasconcelos et al., 2022).

Without critical reflection, projects risk achieving results that are neither meaningful for the community nor transformative for students. Worse, they may inadvertently reinforce stereotypes, exploit marginalised populations, or create superficial solutions to complex issues (Asghar & Rowe, 2016). In a post-war context, reflection is vital for understanding the ethical, cultural, and logistical challenges inherent in working with communities under stress and trauma.

The Role of Reflection in Service-Learning

Reflection allows students to understand the broader implications of their work. It helps them link theory with practice, evaluate the impact of their contributions, and confront the limitations of their knowledge. Teachers, through reflection, can identify which methods work best in the given context, adapt learning activities to meet urgent community needs, and enhance their understanding of effective pedagogy in challenging environments (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999).

Reflection in the context of war and recovery should encompass:

- Knowledge in Action: Understanding the theories, concepts, and techniques applied during the project, which often gain new meaning when experienced in a crisis or recovery setting.
- Reflection in Action: Evaluating actions as they happen to ensure alignment with project goals, ethical considerations, and community needs.
- Reflection on Action: Reviewing completed activities to assess their effectiveness and consider lessons learned.
- Reflection for Action: Anticipating challenges and planning approaches that balance academic objectives with the realities of the context..

Tools for Reflection

Several tools can support critical reflection, which should be adapted to meet the sensitivities and urgency of war recovery efforts:

1. **Journaling:** Students can document their experiences, focusing on questions such as: What challenges did you face in the community? How has this experience influenced your understanding of recovery in a war-affected area? This approach fosters ongoing reflection, helps process emotions, and encourages personal growth).
2. **Group Discussions:** Create safe spaces for dialogue where students and community members can reflect on shared experiences. Use facilitation techniques to guide discussion, address complex issues, and foster collaboration.
3. **Artistic Expression:** Encourage students to process their experiences through art, music, photography, or creative writing. In contexts of trauma, these forms can serve as powerful tools for reflection and emotional healing.
4. **Exit Interviews:** Conduct individual interviews at the project's conclusion to capture reflections on successes, challenges, and personal learning. These provide valuable insights for future projects and validate individual contributions.
5. **Reflective Portfolios:** Students compile journals, photos, and other materials documenting their experiences, highlighting their development and contributions throughout the project..

Guiding Reflection

Teachers should clearly communicate:

- The purpose of reflection in the project, especially in the context of war and recovery.
- The chosen reflection methods and how they align with project goals.
- The ethical and procedural rules for engaging in reflective practices, especially when dealing with sensitive topics.

Incorporating reflection into the curriculum requires dedicated times and methods, such as digital storytelling, collective portfolios, or value-based activities. By embedding reflection into the project structure, teachers foster critical thinking, empathy, and resilience. These practices also empower students and teachers to adjust project goals and methods dynamically, ensuring responsiveness to the realities of recovery.

The “5 Cs” of Reflection

As outlined by Eyler & Giles (1999), the principles of reflection—connection, continuity, context, challenge, and coaching—become even more critical in war-affected areas:

- Connection: Link educational goals with the urgent needs of war recovery, ensuring that learning serves the community effectively.
- Continuity: Maintain reflection throughout the project to adapt to evolving circumstances and new challenges.
- Context: Ensure reflection relates to the specific war recovery setting, addressing cultural, social, and political realities.
- Challenge: Encourage participants to confront the complexities of recovery work, from trauma to resource scarcity, in a thoughtful manner.
- Coaching: Provide emotional and intellectual support for participants, recognising the psychological toll of working in post-war communities..

Reflection at Every Stage

Reflection should be integrated throughout the Service-learning process:

1. Pre-reflection: Explore expectations, the community's context, and urgent recovery needs.
2. In-action Reflection: Continuously assess progress, address emerging challenges, and adapt plans to changing realities.
3. Post-reflection: Evaluate the project holistically, considering knowledge gained, challenges overcome, and the project's impact on all participants.

By fostering critical reflection, Service-learning projects in war and recovery contexts can achieve meaningful, sustainable outcomes. This process ensures that students, teachers, and communities collaborate to rebuild stronger, more resilient systems while fostering deeper understanding and empathy.

5.6. Evaluating Your Service-learning Project

Evaluating resources, teaching methods, and tools to assess a Service-learning project is fundamental to understanding its impact on your target group, students, and yourself. A well-executed service-learning project is not only a meaningful opportunity for evaluation and growth for students, but also for the involved community and for the teachers facilitating the project.

To assess the results of the service-learning project, there are several key areas to monitor:

Students' Learning Outcomes (Hard Skills)

These are the indicators that show the short-term impact of the project on students. For example, Harden (2007) recommend an outcome-based approach for medical students, emphasising the value of investing in programmes that expand in breadth, depth, utility, and proficiency.

Students' Learning Outcomes (Soft Skills)

This refers to the long-term effects of the service-learning project, not only its primary impact on students, but also the influence it has on their broader lives. The impact of a student's learning should be reflected in their personal abilities, problem-solving skills, adaptability, capacity for both abstract and concrete thinking, and the ability to transfer knowledge to their everyday lives.

Personal Development (e.g., Values, Personality)

What does each student take away from the project? This is the ultimate goal of a service-learning project for students. It's crucial to consider the personal reflections and values that each student gains from their experiences and how these experiences contribute to their development and personality.

Civic Engagement

It is essential that students feel they are part of a project that not only involves them personally but also impacts their community, including their families and cities. In this regard, it is important that students, through the project, take on responsibility for the protection, management, and involvement in civic issues affecting their social community.

Community Impact

It is necessary to assess the impact of the project on the communities involved. To do so, feedback from community participants is vital for evaluating the project's effectiveness and relevance.

Teaching Practice

It is crucial to assess not only the impact of the project on the target groups and the communities around them but also to provide an opportunity for us, as teachers, to reflect on our own purpose. This reflection allows us to consider how we can improve the active learning experience for students through service-learning projects. Such evaluations can be shared with students: once we collect feedback from our targets (alongside students), it is important to return this information so that students can contribute to the changes, reflect on the lessons learned, and determine how to apply these lessons in their own lives (Mitchell et al., 2015).

Evaluation Methods

Several evaluation methods can be used to assess service-learning projects comprehensively (Strage 2001; Howard 2001; Stocker 2013; Cumpare et al. 2023):

Pre- and Post-Assessment: Pre- and post-assessment surveys measure changes in students' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviours before and after participating in service-learning activities. This method provides quantitative data to assess the impact of the project on student learning outcomes.

Surveys and Interviews: Surveys and interviews gather qualitative feedback from students, faculty, community partners, and other stakeholders regarding their experiences, perceptions, and satisfaction with the service-learning project. These methods offer insights into the perceived benefits, challenges, and areas for improvement.

Reflection and Portfolio Assessment: Reflection activities and portfolio assessments allow students to articulate their learning experiences, personal growth, and contributions to the community. By examining students' reflections and portfolios, teachers can assess the depth of learning, critical thinking skills, and engagement in civic responsibility.

Community Feedback: Gathering feedback from community partners and beneficiaries helps evaluate the impact of service-learning projects on the community. Community members' perspectives on the relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of the projects are essential for assessing community needs and improving campus-community partnerships.

Longitudinal Studies: Longitudinal studies track students' academic and civic outcomes over an extended period, providing insights into the long-term effects of service-learning on students' academic and career trajectories, civic engagement, and social responsibility.

Challenges in Evaluation

Despite its importance, evaluating service-learning projects presents several challenges (Furco & Billig 2002; Reinders 2016; Hochschulnetzwerk 2019; Brok et al. 2021):

Complexity of Outcomes: Service-learning projects often aim to achieve multiple interconnected outcomes related to academic learning, civic engagement, personal development, and community impact. Evaluating these multifaceted outcomes requires comprehensive assessment strategies that capture the complexity of students' experiences and contributions.

Measurement Validity: Ensuring the validity and reliability of evaluation measures is essential for producing accurate and meaningful data. Designing assessment tools that effectively measure desired outcomes, align with project objectives, and account for contextual factors can be challenging.

Resource Constraints: Limited time, funding, and expertise may hinder the implementation of rigorous evaluation processes. Teachers and institutions must allocate sufficient resources for evaluation activities, including staff training, data collection, analysis, and reporting.

Partnership Dynamics: Collaborating with community partners to evaluate service-learning projects can be complex due to differences in priorities, expectations, and capacities. Building trusting relationships, communicating effectively, and addressing power imbalances are essential for successful partnership-based evaluation.

Best Practices in Evaluation

To address these challenges, several best practices can guide the evaluation of service-learning projects (Reinders 2016; Brok et al. 2021):

Clear and Measurable Objectives: Define clear, measurable objectives for service-learning projects that align with institutional, course, and community goals. Clearly articulating expected outcomes facilitates the selection of appropriate evaluation methods and criteria.

Stakeholder Engagement: Involve – if possible – students, faculty, community partners, and other stakeholders in the evaluation process from planning to implementation. Engaging stakeholders fosters ownership, enhances the relevance and validity of evaluation findings, and promotes collaborative learning and improvement.

Mixed-Methods Approach: Use a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods to capture the breadth and depth of project impacts. Triangulating multiple sources of evidence strengthens the credibility and comprehensiveness of evaluation results.

Continuous Improvement: Use evaluation findings to inform ongoing reflection, adjustments, and improvements to Service-learning practices. Establish mechanisms for regular feedback,

data-driven decision-making, and iterative programme development to enhance effectiveness and sustainability.

Evaluation plays a crucial role in assessing the impact and effectiveness of Service-learning projects. By employing diverse evaluation methods, addressing challenges, and following best practices, teachers and institutions can generate valuable insights, demonstrate outcomes, and enhance the quality and sustainability of Service-learning initiatives. As Service-learning continues to evolve, robust evaluation processes are essential for maximising its educational, civic, and community benefits.



Photo from the Consortium Meeting of the Project:
Service-Learning in Higher Education for Ukraine's Recovery (ServU)

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