

From Obscurity to Valuable Contributor:**A Description of A Critical Service Learning Project and the Behind the Scenes Collaboration**

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In this follow up to “From Obscurity to Valuable Contributor: A Case for Critical Service-Learning,” the authors detail how they collaborate in order to produce a successful project through the interviewing of Holocaust survivors. In this description, readers learn about the planning, interviews, and the final product produced by the students – with examples of student writing and photographs. As reference for educators looking to develop their own projects, the article covers how to build an authentic relationship across diverse communities, generate content knowledge and design classroom curriculum, and provides a chart detailing the collaboration and activities that educators can use as a template for organizing their own projects.

Collaborative service-learning projects have become increasingly common in higher education, whether they are conducted at four-year research universities or two-year community colleges. To organize such projects, faculty generally unite with the leaders of CBOs, Community-Based Service Providers, to devise ways that students can connect course content to a service that they provide for a particular institution, all while reflecting upon how this experience relates to their own lives. At times, faculty members may also work with colleagues to develop curriculum for learning communities that will work with a CBO on a service learning project. However, some collaborative projects are more successful than others. The projects that are the most successful are typically those that deeply impact their lives and extend their learning far beyond the classroom, but such projects challenge faculty and CBO leaders to determine the necessary components of a truly successful collaboration.

In this essay, we will provide a detailed account of a very successful collaboration between two two-year college faculty members, Julia Carroll, who taught an advanced level ESL reading course, and Jennifer Maloy, who taught an intermediate level developmental writing course, and Marisa Berman, the assistant director at the Harriet and Kenneth Kupferberg Holocaust Resource Center and Archives at Queensborough Community College (KHRCA), City University of New York. This essay will detail both the project itself and the collaborative process that made this work possible.

The co-authors, Julia, Jennifer, and Marisa, share an approach to teaching and learning that places high value on communication and a willingness to approach new tasks with an open mind. This shared approach helped to facilitate the countless hours of planning in areas such as curriculum design and activities involving the students and the Holocaust survivors. At various times throughout the project, we were called upon to solve unforeseen difficulties, revise previous intentions, and rework future plans. Through each of these challenges, it was necessary for each of us to actively participate in the project in order to ensure its ultimate success. Below, we offer a detailed description of our collaboration and the creation of a thematic reading and writing curriculum that provided the essential scaffolding needed for our students to be prepared to interview a group of Holocaust survivors. This curriculum included interview preparation, the actual interviews between the students and the survivors, analysis of quotes garnered from interviews, and a culminating celebration at the end of the project. Unlike many models of service-learning, our project allowed for a reciprocal benefit to both students and survivors.

Building an Authentic Relationship across Diverse Communities

The reciprocal relationship that existed between the survivors, the students, the

instructors, and the Assistant Director of the KHRCA developed gradually. This process began in January 2013, prior to the semester in which this project took place, when we met to discuss potential thematic material related to the Holocaust, on topics such as, hatred, discrimination, prejudice, and bias. Following this meeting, Marisa and Julia shared resources for teaching these topics, and Marisa met with Jennifer and Julia to explore ways that the KHRCA could be used to scaffold the knowledge that the students would acquire regarding the Holocaust, hatred, and discrimination before meeting the survivors. The various conversations that Jennifer and Julia had with Marisa aided their ability to select appropriate materials for their students to read; design specific curriculum-based assignments that were pertinent to the survivor population; and create reflective tools that took both the student population and the survivor population into consideration. This type of consistent and open communication and careful planning provided the foundation for the students and the survivors to be able to develop authentic and sustained relationships.

Generating Content Knowledge and Designing Classroom Curriculum

In her 2004 article, “Facing (Up to) ‘the Stranger’ in Community Service Learning,” Margaret Himley describes the benefits of investigating the community or the “strangers” before conducting a formal service learning project. As Himley points out, service-learning requires students to understand the issues and concerns relevant to the community with which they will work (435). From Himley’s argument, Jennifer and Julia recognized that it would be necessary to help their students to develop background knowledge of the events of the Holocaust as well as incidents of contemporary hate crimes before students conducted their interviews.

Jennifer and Julia felt that the more students knew about the subject matter, the more likely it would be that they could develop authentic relationships with the Holocaust survivors.

Since their students would be working together to interview and write about the Holocaust survivors they would meet, Jennifer and Julia collaborated intensively on the design and development of their curricula to ensure that the thematic elements of their courses were similar in order to allow students the opportunity to develop the background knowledge necessary for the project. However, it was necessary that the materials differed to meet the needs of their respective courses. In the ESL reading class, Julia assigned her students to read a book entitled *Parallel Journeys* by Eleanor H. Ayer, Helen Waterford, and Alfons Heck. This story depicts the parallel lives of two adolescents who lived during the time of the Holocaust: Helen Waterford, who was a Jewish Holocaust Survivor, and Alfons Heck, who was a Nazi youth leader. The chapters in *Parallel Journeys* alternate between describing the agony and pain of what Helen and her family endured and Alfons's experience as part of the Hitler Youth. To guide students' reading, Julia developed a detailed curriculum guide based on the book, which included reading comprehension as well as personal reflection questions for each chapter. Initially, the ESL students in Julia's class complained that the book was too difficult and complicated. Having had very little exposure to the history of the Holocaust or even World War II in their home countries, many students struggled to navigate their way through the many historical references and dates. However, as their reading skills continued to improve, they were better able to understand the historical context--and thus the exigence--for their project.

In order to show students the relevance of this project in contemporary terms, Julia also developed a unit on modern hate crimes. This unit was subdivided into three specific topic areas:

hate crimes against immigrants (specifically undocumented immigrants), the LGBTQ community, and hate crimes enacted through cyber bullying. Students were assigned to small groups to conduct research and prepare lessons on each theme that included multiple choice questions to help them prepare for the standardized test that they would be required to take at the end of the semester. In addition, students wrote reflections about how they as individuals could take action in their communities to educate others about social inequities, blatant discrimination, and false stereotypes. While these activities helped students to build contextual knowledge for their projects, they also had the added benefit of assisting students in becoming more empathetic towards the survivors as well.

Jennifer's writing class also addressed topics related to contemporary discrimination and hate crimes. Jennifer introduced the topic by assigning her students an essay entitled "My Life as an Undocumented Immigrant," written by Jose Antonio Vargas, which describes the discrimination he faced as an immigrant. Building from the themes in Vargas' essay, students were then asked to consider the extent to which they had witnessed or experienced discrimination, prejudice, or stereotyping in their own lives. For their next assignment, the students in Jennifer's writing class read an essay on racial and ethnic stratification that Julia's reading class also had read. This essay provided students with a vocabulary to discuss specific types of discrimination and hate crimes and to contextualize the Holocaust within this framework. Once students read this essay, they were given a research assignment in which they had to search for an example of a hate crime in a newspaper. To scaffold this assignment, Jennifer spent time in class discussing the definition and examples of hate crimes before the students were asked to read and summarize an article on this topic. They were also asked to choose an important idea or issue in the article, explain why that idea or issue was significant,

and conclude by deciding whether this particular event should be considered a hate crime and why. Students discussed recent hate crimes against young gay men, the extent to which cyber bullying could be considered a hate crime, and whether racial profiling that resulted in injury or death could be considered a hate crime. Through an examination of current issues related to discrimination and hate crimes, students developed a foundation of concepts through which they could conceptualize their interviews with their Holocaust survivor.

Interview Preparation

To augment the content-based knowledge on racism, discrimination, and the history and effects of the Holocaust the students acquired in Jennifer's and Julia's classes, the students also attended two presentations at the KHRCA. On the first visit, the Executive Director, Dr. Flug, gave a presentation contrasting daily life for Jewish people living in Europe before the onset of World War II with how they were treated during the Holocaust. With that, Dr. Flug showed the students a film about the Hitler Youth, demonstrating how the Nazi party indoctrinated German children. This film featured Alfons Heck, the Nazi whose life was chronicled in *Parallel Journeys*, which was assigned in Julia's ESL reading class. Later, Dr. Flug led a tour of the KHRCA's permanent and rotating gallery, giving students the opportunity to view artifacts and photographs pertaining to the Holocaust. Finally, to connect back to the unit on contemporary hate crimes from Jennifer's writing class, students also viewed a short film created by the KHRCA that discussed local hate crimes and their relationship to the type of hatred and discrimination towards the Jews that took place in Nazi Germany.

A few weeks later, the students attended the second presentation at the KHRCA, where Marisa provided Jennifer and Julia's students with practical strategies and tips on how to conduct

their interviews. She began by discussing the concept of emotional trauma and explaining how the survivors still feel regarding the past to illustrate the need for the students to be sensitive to those experiences. To prepare students for their own interviews, Marisa presented YouTube videos of former QCC students sharing their experiences of interviewing Holocaust survivors as part of an internship program. Finally, she provided the students with a sample handout containing examples of open-ended questions in order to show how such questions could foster a conversation during an interview.

The final activity at the KHRCA that day consisted of creating the small groups that would interview the survivors. The seven groups were comprised of six or seven students divided between Julia's ESL reading students and Jennifer's developmental writing students. Students were assigned to a group to ensure that each one represented a diversity of ability level, personality, gender, and cultural background. Once the groups were formed, Jennifer and Julia then facilitated a practice interview activity in which each student group had to come up with five interview questions related to a current event. Students watched a video that detailed a hate crime in a Jewish community that had taken place a week beforehand on Holocaust Remembrance Day and created interview questions that they would ask a victim of this hate crime. After this practice interview activity, the students spent the remainder of the class developing eight questions that they wanted to ask a Holocaust survivor.

The Interview and End-of-Semester Celebration



On the day of the actual interviews, the students sat together in their groups with a survivor at each table in the KHRCA. While the students began to conduct their interviews, Jennifer, Julia, and Marisa circulated around the room to facilitate and assist where necessary. Not surprisingly, though, the students seemed engrossed in the survivors' stories and did not need assistance of any kind. They focused on asking the survivors' questions and listening intently to their answers while the survivors showed them pictures, memorabilia, and maps of Europe at the time of the Holocaust. The students took turns asking questions with ease, and their questions naturally seemed to evolve from factual to reflective as the interviews progressed. Photographs from this event show students being attentive, making direct eye contact with survivors, and taking notes.

Students were also eager to audio and video record the survivors' testimony as well as take photographs of themselves with the survivors once the interview was complete. The students seemed to recognize that this was a significant event in their lives and conversed with their interviewees with respect and empathy.

After the interviews, the students completed an assignment in which they selected a quote from their interviewee and explained its significance. Students revised their contributions

through peer review and editing activities, and the students discussed their analyses of quotes from the interviews as well as how they structured their contributions in class. Once students' contributions were finalized, they were compiled into a booklet that included an explanation of the project, photographs from the interviews, short bios of each survivor, and the students' writing. The booklet was titled *Understanding: Learning About the Holocaust by Interviewing Survivors*. Sixteen pages in length, the book is printed with over 25 color images of the students and survivors and is divided into sections of student work based on the survivor interviewed. Student work ranges in length from a few sentences to five hundred words.

The student contributions from the thank-you booklet clearly indicate their respect and appreciation towards the survivors and their overall understanding of the importance of these personal accounts. The student writing also shows that they were grateful to hear these stories directly from survivors. While students were not required to make reflections on their life experiences in their quote analysis, many of them chose to connect the quote to their own lives.

Student 1

Quote: "Make the best of your bad situation and move on."

Significance of Quote: Because [the survivor] had suffered so much through the Holocaust, first by losing her parents and second by starting over her life in a new country, England, with people she didn't know, she felt hunted her whole life. This feeling stopped her from moving forward until she realized how much this could affect her life. She decided to try to see the positive side of the situation, which helped her rebuild her life and start over in another direction to become a mother and a grandmother and finish her studies to eventually work as a librarian. This taught me to remember that no matter how bad your life seems, you need to strive for the future and push ahead.

Student 2

One of my team-members asked, do you hate Hitler for what he did to you, your family, and Jewish people on a whole? [The survivor] answered no, she went on further to say that she has learned to forgive, not forget but forgive. To hate Hitler would mean allowing hate to consume her life and she would not be able to love herself or others. So she did not want to walk around full of hate. For me this quote means you should not hate others because if you do you will not be able to love yourself or anyone else.

This quote relates to my life in a positive way. I will now react to others in a different way when they make me angry. [The survivor]'s quote has taught me to think before I speak and not when others are hateful. Because bad things can happen to us in life, like the loss of a loved one, and we have to be strong and not think of doing hateful things to the person who harms our loved one. But let the law do its job because if we go after that person we will become as hateful as the person who harmed our loved one and it is not worth it. Being able to overcome hate and show love to others is more rewarding than being hateful.

Students were compelled to reveal very personal reflections in an assignment that they were aware would ultimately be made public and distributed to the Holocaust survivors and their peers. In the three examples above, each student brought the interview experience into his/her own life in some way. Student 1 succinctly describes her interviewee's emotional and psychological evolution and the model of perseverance it provides students. Students 2 and 3 drew upon the same quote from the same interviewee, both describing how this taught them the importance of forgiveness, both on a daily basis and during difficult times, for long-term emotional survival. All three of these excerpts demonstrate the weight with which students listened to and reflected upon their interviewee's words and experiences.

At the end of the semester, the survivors and students were invited back to the KHRCA for a celebration where they each received a copy of the completed booklet. A number of students volunteered to read their writing to the survivors and in front of their peers. The

survivors, who were already overwhelmed by their gift, were deeply moved by the students' presentations, particularly those by English language learners, as well as those who shared very personal reflections with the group. Each survivor then addressed the students and shared their gratitude for the booklets and how impressed they were by the presentations.



In the photographs above, the survivors reach out to the students who interviewed them to personally thank them and congratulate them on their work. The survivors expressed appreciation towards the students for retelling their stories, as well as empathy for the students who shared their own personal hardships.

Implications for Future Projects

Although this project took place over one semester, this activity has long-term implications. Some students were deeply affected by their study of the Holocaust and have expressed an interest to apply to the KHRCA's competitive Holocaust internship program, which compensates students with a stipend, resume building experience, and sometimes college credits.

Further, the success of this project has inspired Jennifer, Julia, and Marisa to commit to long-term collaborations for future service-learning projects with the KHRCA. While these new projects may be based on the original, some elements will have to change in order to still provide a service to the community partner (the KHRCA). While it will be challenging for the instructors to modify curricula each semester, doing so will ensure that the project will always contain new and innovative elements.

While the students and faculty of QCC are fortunate to have an established Holocaust museum on their campus, some readers may be concerned about how they could create a comparable project at their own school. According to the 2014 Directory of the Association of Holocaust Organizations, in the United States there are over 314 Holocaust museums or educational facilities in forty states. Forty-eight of these centers are located on college campuses, five of which are located at community colleges (“Members Directory”). Many of these facilities have the ability to arrange for Holocaust survivors to visit local schools for presentations and interviews. This is not the only option, however. Any type of local museum could be used to facilitate a critical service-learning project. Students could work with local historical societies, archives, libraries, or any type of institution where oral testimonies are used in some way. One aspect of the discussed project that was vital to its success was that students interacted directly with residents who play an important role in the community. It was this social interaction that made the project come alive since it brought history off of the page and into the real world and fostered critical service-learning. If the students had merely studied the Holocaust in the classroom and visited the museum it might not have had the same impact on the students. In this project, however, the students were no longer serving as just an audience to a lesson, but rather they were active participants in the learning process. This allowed students to take control of

their own development as readers and writers in order to produce writing that serves as a testament of the survivors' experience, as well as their own, in perpetuity.

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Appendix:

Collaboration and Project Activities		
Time Period	ESL Reading Class	Developmental Writing Class
January 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Julia and Jennifer meet with Marisa to plan project. 	
January 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Julia and Jennifer discuss, plan, and create common thematic curriculum in order to prepare their students to interview Holocaust survivors. 	
February 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students read passages from a sociology text on race, discrimination and prejudice. They read, write, and discuss these concepts before reading <i>Parallel Journeys</i>. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students write about issues related to contemporary discrimination and hate crimes. ● Students read and discuss essay entitled “My Life as an Undocumented Immigrant.”
February 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students begin reading and discussing <i>Parallel Journeys</i>. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students read passages from a sociology text on race, discrimination and prejudice.
Mid-February 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students visit the KHRCA to hear a lecture and see two films about the Holocaust and modern hate crimes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students visit the KHRCA to hear a lecture and see two films about the Holocaust and modern hate crimes.
Late February 2013 through March 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students continue to read and discuss <i>Parallel Journeys</i>. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students are asked to research a particular contemporary hate crime to contextualize the Holocaust before the students interview the survivors.
March 11, 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ESL students and development writing students meet for the first time at the KHRCA to hear lecture about how to interview a Holocaust survivor. They then participate in a mock interview activity in mixed groups to practice the skill of interviewing. 	

March 18, 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ESL students and developmental writing students meet in their mixed interview groups to plan their interview questions and practice conducting interviews. 	
March 23, 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ESL students and developmental writing students conduct actual interviews with Holocaust survivors. There are approximately four writing and three reading in each group. ● Interviews last approximately one hour. ● Students take handwritten notes and record their interviews. ● All students are asked record their interviews and select the best quotations to analyze and relate to their own personal experiences. This homework assignment is used as a basis of the thank-you booklet which the students will later give to the Holocaust survivors. 	
April 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students work in pairs to revise and edit their quotations/reactions that will go into booklets. ● Final versions of the booklet are given to the professor to be merged with quotes from the other class. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students work with peers in their class to revise and edit the quotations/reactions that will go into booklets. ● Final versions of the booklet are given to the professor to be merged with quotes from the other class.
Late April into Early May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Julia, Jennifer, and Marisa meet to plan the final celebration ceremony. ● They also discuss meet to discuss the final layout of the thank-you booklet. ● They work on final editing and production of booklet. ● They brainstorm similar educational service-learning projects for the upcoming semester and beyond. 	
May 15, 2013	<p style="text-align: center;">Holocaust Celebration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ESL students and developmental writing students reconvene with Holocaust survivors to give them the thank-you booklet and express their gratitude by reading from the booklets as well as other thank you letters. 	

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