**ONE YEAR AFTER REPORT: FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR’S MAIDEN SERVICE-LEARNING CLASS**

By Stan West

                Creating First-Year Seminar’s very first service-learning class has been as much a learning experience for me as it has for the students. This journey began nearly 18 months ago when I watched CNN reports of the Haitian earthquake.  Like most viewers, I was shocked and stunned by the suffering and wanted to do “something.” The “something” I decided to do is to create a class where Columbia College freshmen would undergo “transformational learning” while “inventing community.”

I define “transformational learning” as education where a student’s life is changed…forever. That’s what I envisioned when a year or so ago I created this service-learning class on Haitian art for Columbia freshmen coming from rural, suburban and urban locales around the country. My goal was to give them the power to change their worldviews. I define “inventing community” as the process by which narrow, oft-narcissistic views of their worlds widened to see how others live, sometimes differently and often the same. This challenge is huge. Considering the images and implications of Haitian Vodun art and the hysterical stereotypes connected with Haitians (type in Haiti in Google and you’ll invariably get “It’s the poorest country in the western hemisphere”); (type in Voodoo & you’ll get Hollywood-manufactured symbols of zombies); (and type in art and you’ll get lots of abstractions that may totally turn you off about creativity, especially if you’re very analytical and not visually inspired). Even to me, a risk-taker, who once lived in South Africa and is currently working with Columbia Television students on documentary on teaching and learning in the townships, creating a course based on “change,” was a daunting task. Needless to say, I knew my work was cut out for me.  Yet I pushed on.

I’m writing you today to present sketchy evidence that hints “transformational learning” has taken place and that in the process my students “invented community.” I will provide some qualitative evidence as well as quantitative evidence for your perusal. I’ll discuss methods.

I should mention early on that I’ve presented preliminary results at the following venues:

·         Columbia College Wong Center (Exhibit 1), November, 2010

·         Haiti Independence Day celebration at Evanston’s Levy Center, January, 2011

·         The Hawaii Conference on Arts and Humanities, Honolulu, January, 2011

·         Columbia College Wong Center (Exhibit 2), January, 2011

·         Columbia College Chicago’s First-Year Seminar meeting of FYS instructors, January, 2011

·         The National Assn. of African-American Scholars Conference, Baton Rouge, February, 2011

·         Columbia College Critical Encounters Student Showcase, (Exhibit 3) April, 2011

·         College Summit Retreat with Haitian Educators, Miami, May, 2011

·         SoTL Conference on teaching and learning, Omaha, June, 2011

·         Illinois Campus Contact, University Center-Chicago, June, 2011

·         And I’d like to present “coding” assessment results at SoTL’s conference in LA, June, 2012

I should also take a moment to thank the following educators and activists who helped our class:

·         Dia Penning, at CTE, who saw the potential of this proposed class for students 18 months ago, and now sees its potential for future teachers interested in service-learning

·         Lott Hill, same as above

·         Dr. Rob Lagueux, same as above

·         Dean Deborah Holdstein, same as above

·         CCAP’s Paul Tereul, same as above

·         All 3 gallery owners (Nicole Smith, Marilyn Houlberg and Laurie Beasley), same asabove

·         Neysa Page-Lieberman, the “godmother” of our course, helped arrange 3 exhibits and taught my students how to create “found art” Vodun art, and explained its beauty.

·         Judge Lionel Baptiste, head of the Haitian Congress to Fortify Haiti, who worked with all three classes and helped produce our second exhibit, and we in turn helped produce his

·         Dr. Cadence Wynter, who visited our first exhibit and delivered a lecture on Haitian history.

·         Shanita Akintonde, who taught my students how to construct a marketing plan.

·         Dimitri Moore, who taught my students how to construct video essays

·         Portfolio Center’s Mercedes Cooper taught my students how to catalog their artistic work.

·         Joan Giroux, who helped me build my class Moodle site and gave me a “found art” link.

·         Carolle Voltaire, Columbia’s Upward Bound director, who visited our second exhibit.

·         Janine Raymond, liaison to the Clinton-Bush Haiti Fund, who spoke to our very first class, visited our third class at Nicole Gallery and just this June met with me to praise our journey

·         UCLA cultural anthropologist Anna Creagh, who researched “Hollywood & Voodoo.”

·         Mary Ann Danielson, Creighton College & SoTL director, invited me to present in June, 2011

·         Kathleen Perkins, who helped me prepare for my SoTL presentation with great questions, and asked me to refine my “burning research question” to be “Can a service-learning class ‘invent community’ with Haitian art? And if so, can we assess if ‘transformational learning’ has taken place?” She really helped frame my presentation as a Carnegie Fellow in 2011.

·         Dr. Jackie Dewar, the Loyola Marymount math professor, who mentored me at SoTL and has asked that I publish assessment “coding” results in SoTL publications and a case study on how one reluctant student transformed into an engaged learner, and present both in 2012

·         Dr. Nina Reich, the Loyola Marymount University Communications Department instructor whose class works on the U.S.-Mexican border where women and girls are increasingly becoming victims of drug gang violence . Nina became “my sister in the struggle” by examining how community-based learning (CBL) can promote transformational learning. What that means is according to her questions are: ”How can CBL courses like mine move beyond service and become a vehicle for social change? How can my students attain a heightened consciousness about being an engaged citizen to demonstrate an increased commitment to improving their community and the lives of others? And of course, how the community partners can best assess that?” (This report hopefully answers both).

·         Dr. Ed Taylor, a Penn State-Harrisburg educator and global expert in “transformational learning” who helped me better use literature reviews when preparing scholarly articles and lectures. Taylor co-edited with Jack Mezirow the classic, Transformative Learning in Practice.

·         Hope Daniels, who shared the Campus Contact table with me where we agreed to copy-edit our respective scholarly articles on media aspects of our service-learning classes.

·         NEA’s International Relations coordinator Jill Christiansen, whom I presented our Haitian art

class to at the NEA’s Joint Conference on Women and Minorities in New Orleans June, 2010, has invited me to participate in the Belgium-based Educational International’s Conference in Cape Town in July. I’ll share results of our class at the conference and in the townships.

·         Dr. Ann Mooney, the 2011-2012 Critical Encounters Fellow who was “amazed” by the April presentation by my students and their projects that she invited us to participate next year.

·         To my freshman students who challenged themselves to learn about other cultures. Out of 18 students in each of 3 classes, only 1 failed and 2 transferred to traditional classes. Most received Bs and a few received As and Cs on group projects and individual assignments.

·         And my Haitian relatives like Aunt Madeline & cousin Jean Paul, who welcomed me “home.”

The goal of this proposed Service-Learning class is to offer incoming freshman, who are often just learning about themselves in an adult way, chances to learn new ways to “invent community” in First-Year Seminar (FYS) this Fall.  This means they learn about others while they learn about themselves. This also means they can use that knowledge to make oft-marginalized communities richer, stronger, better. The Provost says this may be the only Columbia class that focuses primarily on ideas. My goal is to give those ideas a sense of purpose, a sense of mission, a sense of meaning connecting Columbia classrooms with the Chicago area art gallery showrooms and with the Haitian art community.  Hopefully, students would become more empathic and would show an artist response to disaster.

FYS has a three-topic structure with each lasting 4 to 5 weeks. The first is “Composing a Self,” a big idea where with the use of guiding questions centers on how do we see ourselves and how to others see us, are asked in context with exercises about what does your name and place mean? Then I use the same question to assist with reading Persepolis, the story of an Iranian girl coming of age during the Islamic Revolution. We begin this course at place where students are – self discovery – and stretch out to other communities. Learning theorists point out with teens it is logical to begin with self before going to others. It helps teens understand “otherness” or “difference” once they have a better idea who they are.  In this journey from self to others they develop empathy. Since they create cultural products along the way, ultimately they’ll address whether or not they have responsibility for what they create. Here, the critical reflection from the organizing questions helps addressing philosophical and ethical dilemmas.

The second unit, “Inventing Communities,” seemed to be the best fit for our Service-Learning class, because it centers on a big idea learning about art, people and projects in Haiti through visiting three local “community” art galleries inquiring into the art of “found objects” as well as more formal, traditional painting, writing about it in weekly 300-word blogs that later will be revised to video-essays to be shared with teen counterparts in Haiti’s cultural capital of Jacmel and political capital of Port-au-Prince. Another goal was reproducing them as part of individual and group projects that would later be displayed at Columbia’s galleries thanks in part to Director of Exhibition and Performance Spaces Neysa Page-Lieberman, who curated the 2007 “Vodou Riche,” exhibit where two classes of my 2007 my FYS students wrote reviews and created art based on “found objects” they saw visiting Haitian artists’ exhibit. Students learned critical lessons about construction, design and the vision of Vodou (not voodoo), which is simply defined as representation of West African religion in the West, and not the Hollywood pathological image many admitted had previously conjured.

The very first assignment I ask them to do is a “cultural competence personal reflection” designed by T.D. Good (1989, revised 2002 American Speech-Language-Hearing Association 2010). With this Cultural Competence Checklist, freshmen try to honestly answer a series of questions such as “Do I believe it is acceptable to use language other English;” or “Do I respect non-traditional family structures (e.g. divorced parents, same gender parents, grandparents as caretakers);” and “Do I understand that the use of a foreign accept or limited English skill is not a reflection of reduced intellectual capacity or the ability to communicate clearly or effectively”? There were other critical questions, too.  This tool was designed to heighten their awareness of how they view diverse populations.

The second exercise was to introduce them to Haitian-American artists’ poems like Lenell Moise’s “Quaking Conversation.” Students wrote poems that displaced empathy, one of the course goals, and a few produced video-essays that included their lyrical poems that placed the students in Haiti at the time of the earthquake.

<http://lenellemoise.blogspot.com/2010/01/new-poem-quaking-conversation.html>

During the four-week period, FYS students visited one gallery per week where they generated weekly reports that were given up to 2 points out of the semester’s 100 points. This helped form an online journal. There’s considerable compositional theory and rhetorical theory on the benefits of journaling that include development of argument, theme development, narrative structure, style, and writing-as-therapy. As a backgrounder, I gave them a Washington Post article about a Haitian artist looking for their child in the rubble asking students to role-play. What if your parents were looking for you? How would they react? What if you were looking for your kid?

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/01/15/AR2010011502412.html>

With the first journal entry that hopefully illustrated a level or empathy, I required some structure based in part on experiential education philosopher John Dewey’s six-part structure as proposed by theorist David Kolb (1984) regarding inquiry, which is an FYS goal. According to the “Introduction to Service-Leaning Toolkit”(Cone & Harris, 5), Kolb conceptualizes Dewey’s six steps as a four-stage experiential learning cycle involving concrete experiences, reflection, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. “Learners are engaged in a cycle in which community of work settings forms the basis for (online) written or oral communication. Under the guidance of an instructor, reflective work is used to form abstract concepts and hypotheses are generated which then get cycled back into further concrete experiences. It is a student-centered model which Kolb believes allows students with very different learning styles to develop and integrate their skills.” (5).

1)      encountering a problem

2)      formulating a problem or question to be resolved

3)      gathering information which suggests solutions

4)      making hypothesis

5)      testing hypothesis, and

6)      making warranted assertions

Through their journaling, students learned this course was more time-intensive than traditional courses. It was just as rigorous, maybe more, some said. Our goals, objectives, strategies, expectations were be clearly spelled out in the beginning of the course. They consisted of FYS’s current academic learning objectives of critical-thinking and problem-solving skills through inquiry community learning skills such as learning about the wider Haitian art community and the local Haitian-American community of more than 30,000 as well as inter and intra-person learning such as how to collaborate with others, learning about groups and cultures, exploring personal values, ethics, learning about self, and developing a sense of awe, all of which are also FYS learning objectives. I used the “Matrix 3b and 3d Learning Strategies and Assessment Methods” worksheets and the “Readings for Students about Civic Responsibility” handout obtained from experts like Editor Jeffrey Howard of the Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning (Edward Ginsberg Center for Community Service and Learning at the University of Michigan, 2001). Local Haitian-American leaders like Janine Raymond, liaison to the “Clinton-Bush Fund” and gallery owners assessed FYS students from a community perspective. Students also did weekly self-assessments. I explained that the service component was “increasing visibility of Haitian reconstruction and awareness of Haitian art communities” has been determined by our community service partners, but the sound learning objectives have been determined by yours truly in conjunction with the established best practices. I mentioned our need to be a little flexible, adapting to changing logistical conditions. I explained the self-assessment and assessment tools we used.

Finally, students created artistic group products and wrote artist statements to show how they addressed my burning questions, Can a service-learning class “invent community” with Haitian art? And if so, can we assess if “transformational learning” has taken place? The short answer is – probably. The long answer will be explored in lengthy article in a scholarly journal published by SoTL that will use “coding” from students’ critical reflections and assessments to cite themes some cited as evidence of learning. I’m also planning to publish in other scholarly journals and newspapers. I’m also a journalist.

They also did individual projects –-- a video essay -- for the third unit (“Forming Ethical Perspectives”) where students ask “What ought I do?” “Do I have a social responsibility for what I create”? The texts were Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein and Paul Haggis’ Crash. Each unit had a rubric that I used to assess the projects and statements to see whether or not the student achieved the argument-deconstruction learning goals. I explained the rubric in class, distributed an artist statement handout, and got feedback on how to improve upon it – a technique scholars say improves meta-cognition. All of this achieved buy-in, helped clarify goals, clearly defined objectives, spelled out assessment criteria and created a structured, yet flexible way to achieve service-learning in a student-centered way.

Please allow me to back-track a little bit to the writing- reflection element of their weekly reports. To add more depth to the “critical reflection,” I built on David Moore’s 1990 post-structuralist approach to experiential learning using a “critical pedagogy” that investigates the history, power relationships and value commitments of social institutions, which in this case involves the colonial French and imperial American links to the fragile, oft-corrupt Haitian state, and how that has played out in the second democracy in the West. (The U.S. was first). It’s important that students know that it is essential in this course to “approach experience with conceptual tools.” (Cone & Harris, 5) In this case, those tools are questions and knowing how to gather information. Using outside reading, lectures from the gallery owners, and set up questions from me and the students added depth and detail to their weekly notes, which were both online and in hard copy, even video and audio files. To augment their multimedia chronicles, I invited guest speakers in person and via Skype to chat from remote locations including Haiti and about how well or not so well the service-learning class is performing helpful, transformable change. Experts were pleased with the process and the product from our class. Some, like Haitian-born Carolle Voltaire, a Columbia UpwardBound instructor, marveled at how far the students came from the first day in September when she talked to them to their January 12, 2011 Wong Center exhibit. Not only did this produce better results, but it was a better fit our motto of “create change.”

<http://www.chicagoartistsresource.org/literary/node/31260>

<http://www.oakpark.com/News/Articles/02-01-2011/Remembering_Haiti_and_critiquing_%27Avatar%27>

It also mirrored my own professional, personal and pedagogical experience. Here’s why: My Haitian in-laws, the Bourellys of Jacmel and Port-au-Prince, helped teach me some of the nuances and complexities of their nation from an authentic perspective when I was a U.N. Election Monitor in Haiti’s 1995 Parliamentary elections. I reported on that historic event for Chicago’s WNUA FM and Port-au-Prince’s Radio Kiskeya. I’ve written several articles about the Haitian and Haitian-American community. I met with a representative of the State Department in 1990 to protest the unfair treatment of Haitian political refugees versus Cuban political refugees, a disparity that reporters like me said had racial, class and geo-political biases attached. For two decades, I’ve been close to Chicago’s top Haitian-American leaders such as Rainbow-PUSH’s Janine Raymond, who is President Bill Clinton’s and Rev. Jesse Jackson’s translator in Haiti,(who spoke at our very first class) and Evanston Alderman and now Chicago Circuit Court Judge Lionel Jean Baptiste, formerly an activist attorney who introduced me to President Jean Bertrand Aristide in the ‘90s , (and who critiqued our first two exhibits).  Janine Raymond read a post-earthquake column I wrote for the Wednesday Journal. She frequently calls me to assist outreach to the media. Baptiste is the primary Chicago area contact for Haitian reconstruction.

As an educator, I’ve worked two summer workshops at Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale helping Haitian and other inner city Miami-area youth prepare college lists as part of a DC-based non-profit where I’m a director of college counseling. I was just there speaking with Haitian educators May 14th. Last semester, I enrolled in my third French course at Columbia College. I got a B+. I privately study Haitian Kreyol from a book given to him by my Aunt Madeline Bourelly-Laroche, then a psychology professor at the University of Haiti. She teased me when I could not fully understand a Moliere play in TV at her Champs de Mars home not to return to Haiti until I learn French and Kreyol. She died a few years ago of old age. I think she’d be proud that I’ve studied both and continue to connect with Haiti.  She’d probably praise my use of social theory and behavioral psychology.

As a graduate of the University of New Orleans with an MFA in Creative Writing, who happened to have been in the Crescent City Katrina Weekend, I’ve volunteered for four years on service-learning projects with Chicago and New Orleans artists and students involved in post-Katrina recovery including Chicago Calling, teaching-artists collective, which incidentally critiqued our second Wong Center exhibit. <http://www.chicagoartistsresource.org/literary/node/31260>

I mention all of this to show proof that I had adequate practical and theoretical expertise to create, execute and assess a service-learning FYS class. That does not mean that I have all of answers.  During our course, FYS students created artistic products and wrote artist statements to show they addressed the questions in the “visual texts” they encountered at the galleries. In late April, they exhibited their own artistic products at Columbia as part of the Critical Encounters 2011 theme of**: “**Image and Implication” where explained their Ezili, Gede and Nkisi altars on display that students and teacher touched, but also pulled up their Facebook page on Haitian art that increased awareness about this vibrant creative community here and in Haiti. To assess the quality and quantity of hits we’ll use free social network tracking software like Facebook Insights, Big Champagne & Tech Soup. [**http://www.facebook.com/pages/Haitian-Art-Galleries-in-Chicago/125836217472982?ref=ts**](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Haitian-Art-Galleries-in-Chicago/125836217472982?ref=ts)

The students’ stunning Haitian Vodun art exhibit that was reported in The Columbia Chronicle probed the many ways “insider art vs. outsider art” is discussed, and who decides what’s in or out? It also asked what role the media has in framing these “schemas”? I was thrilled when they were able to incorporate theoretical texts about privilege, colonialism and art into their presentations. Three students – one Black, one White and one Biracial Bolivian-Lithuanian student –“did a splendid job,” said the two curators of the exhibit, which included a fine art grad student and a journalism professor. My media connections and those from gallery owners and Haitian stakeholders made this a media-friendly project that garnered favorable coverage. Chicago dailies and weeklies covered our second exhibit in January, which was one year to the date of the Haitian earthquake. One female reporter from the Chicago Tribune actually showed up to see the student work that she wrote a small advance on. We were thrilled that the local media and FYS students asked how have Haitian people in general and artists in particular have been portrayed? (This was also one the themes of the 2007 “Vodou Riche” exhibit where my traditional FYS and other students so actively participated in as part of Columbia College’s college-wide issue interdisciplinary issue initiative Critical Encounters “Poverty and Privilege.”)Some call that “media literacy.” Others call it “cultural criticism.” That’s the learning part.

The service part occurred after-class through the many hits on their Facebook site. Students worked in conjunction with the 3 Chicago Haitian galleries to increase awareness. The success of how well students increase the visibility of Haitian reconstruction and awareness of Haitian art communities, service was positively assessed by gallery owners and local Haitian leaders like Janine Raymond, liaison to the “Clinton-Bush Fund,” who used the “Matrix 3d Learning Strategies and Assessment Methods” This tool measures “social responsibility learning” in “knowledge, skills and values.” What this means is she and the three gallery owners assessed “how individuals in a particular profession act in socially responsible ways” and “how individuals show responsibility to others when using their skills for the betterment of society.” FYS students assisted in, videotaping, sound capturing, promotion, publicity, marketing, event planning and other activities that are within student disciplines. Haitian leaders and gallery owners praised our students. The three galleries were:

\* **Nicole Gallery**, 231 W. Huron, in the swank River North art gallery area a couple miles north and a 15-minute train or bus ride away, is owned by a Haitian painter Nicole Smith. It specializes in Haitian art. It’s connected with an art center called Le Centre d’Art de Port au Prince that was decimated during the earthquake that now is undergoing a reconstruction thanks in part to fundraisers Smith has held for the center where she first learned to paint.

<http://www.examiner.com/examiner/x-36896-Chicago-Art-Galleries-Examiner~y2010m1d25-Chicago-artists-raise-money-for-Haitian-arts-center>

\* **Ridge Art Gallery**, 21 Harrison Street, owned by painter Laurie Beasley, is in Oak Park, an integrated western suburb 20 minutes away by the Blue Line train at the Austin stop. It specializes in Haitian art and featured a March book-signing benefit for Haitian reconstruction using my book, Suburban Promised Land, as a vehicle to discuss the rich history of Blacks and Biracials in this suburb including Haitian Americans like Michelle Darang-Coleman and Florence Vincent, mother of former Miss America, Marjorie Vincent. It screened video footage of reconstruction efforts in Jacmel, Haiti**,** shot by the students of Ciné Institute, a filmmaking school in Jacmel. [http://www.pioneerlocal.com/oakpark/news/community/2061822,op-ridgesigning-022110-s1.article](http://www.pioneerlocal.com/oakpark/news/community/2061822%2Cop-ridgesigning-022110-s1.article)

\* **Marilyn Houlberg’s private collection** is in her Pilsen home, a 20-minute bus ride to a working-class Latino neighborhood in Chicago’s near South Side. She’s an expert on Haitian art, particularly Vodou Art. She teaches at the School of the Art Institute and appeared on a Columbia panel with Neysa, Laurie Beasley and Veronique Fischetti, a Haitian painter from New York. Houlberg, who contributed to a classic text, Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou (UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1995), just returned from post-earthquake Haiti.

<http://blog.johntunger.com/2005/03/marilyn_houlber.html>

All three gallery owners are familiar with me and my media work on Haiti and Haitian Americans and my Columbia teaching work. According to language extracted from the FYS syllabus that I helped draft some six years ago, this second topic, “Inventing Communities,” focuses on the complex interactions among individuals and the communities they inhabit. How do we find and maintain balance between our private selves and our public selves? What are the obligations of individuals to a collective, and to other individuals within that group? What are the obligations of a group to its members? What is the relationship between the realities and perceptions of a community, among what communities are, what they believe themselves to be, and what they wish they were? How are the images and imagination of a community generated? <http://www.artforhaitianchildren.org/>

I’m reasonably certain that students addressed and answered these questions through critical reflections in their written and online journals during and after their visits to art galleries and interviews with the artists and with rich discussions in class where we debriefed after every gallery visit. Answers also came from independent reading and other research, the hands-on learning that came from creating their own Haitian-influenced art, learning how to exhibit it in Columbia, and sharing their video-essays with Haitian teens at Cine Institute, who will Facebook them back through the already-established links with the galleries. Their video-essays asked and answered do artists have a social and ethical responsibility for what they created? This cultural exchange could also make teens on both sides of the Caribbean feel empowered that teens are playing an important part in Haiti’s cultural reconstruction.

Additionally, students improved their writing skills, artistic skills, and marketing skills as well as learned the cultural geographies of downtown’s polished gallery district, Oak Park’s organic art district and Pilsen’s vibrant art district, and in doing so provide much-needed service to the Haitian art community. One indicator were the grades I gave at the beginning of class where students averaged about 1 to 1.5 out of 2 on weekly reflections with some not turning them in. By the end of class, when we got more buy-in from everyone, grades averaged between 1.5 and 2.  In an unorthodox way, I also used the “Matrix 3b Learning Strategies and Assessment Methods” worksheet  (Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, Edward Ginsberg Center for Community Service and Learning at the University of Michigan, 2001). Usually teachers use this to assess their peers. I adapted its use for our students to chronicle what they learned. It measures “knowledge, skill and values,” which includes “understanding root causes of social problems” and “developing active learning skills.”(42) Each of these communities has a distinct flavor and history that broadened the viewpoints of the students’ own life experiences and perhaps gave them the chance to “Invent Community,” which is a way to redefine and broaden their own sense of people working together for a common goal. In this case, provider and the recipient both benefitted. Students visited the Writing Center, which they said helped improve their writing skills; the Library, which helped improve their researching skills; and the Portfolio Center, which showed them better ways to catalog and present their body of work. At semester’s end, only 1 failed because he showed up once; a few students received a Cs; most received Bs; and some earned As. I believe the gallery owners also learned a little bit more about the culture of Columbia’s community through the FYS students, who were effective ambassadors of our school’s “create change” mission. En route to inventing community with the Haitian art world, my students first built community with themselves. Unit 2 had a group project with a collective grade of up to 30 points for the project and artist’s statement, which we collectively assessed, and up to 7 participation points determined by both Team A found art and Team B marketing plan student leaders and me. While the main intention of this carefully monitored service-learning class was to provide volunteer community service and field study opportunities for freshmen students to polish their academic skills, educational researchers report that this experiential educational approach is premised on “reciprocal learning” (Sigmon, 1979) One immediate lesson local gallery owners said they learned was “how engaged our youth are. ”Often youth are portrayed in negative stereotypes. Our FYS class provided a more complex portrait of youth, according to our community partners’ assessments. This is another way of “Inventing Community.” Conversely, students learned the hows and the whys that Haitians have often been stereotyped, too, through Hollywood and through the media. FYS students learned how to “read” Haitian art. They learned why “The poorest country in the western hemisphere is perhaps the richest country in its artistic contributions considering its proportional population,” said Neysa Page-Lieberman to my class. A few said they will likely continue to study Haitian art after the FYS course. Others may take up French or Kreyol like I did. Some said they will seek out new service-learning courses where academic skills caress community reality. These are among the ways they’re taking service-learning to the next level.

In sum, my research largely employs a qualitative thematic analysis. Sources of data include: pre-class and post-class open-ended inquiries asking students about their interest, experience and commitment to service and social change. Jack Mesirow (1991) supports this kind of evidence. I also include:  student journal reflection papers, student dialogue from in-class guided reflections, qualitative assessment from students and community partners, “found art” objects,  and student teaching evaluations. Next steps will include more coding from pre- and post-assessments, weekly reflections, using codes of development stage themes, and employing Max Qda as a qualitative research tool for the video coding of video-essays. Data should show movement from ignorance to knowledge, methinks.

As someone who has worked with Columbia students on service-learning lessons on Sudan, South Africa, post-Katrina New Orleans, Cheyenne River Reservation, and now post-earthquake Haitian art, I’m pleased to say that the initial and prolific data from this course, does show “transformational learning. ”That said, SoTL suggests I ask students to now organize their reflections in three areas: 1) **What** (content or event are they reflecting on) 2) **So What** (why was this important and how has it enabled me to ….) and 3) **Now What** (How this impacted me and this is what I will do with it?)

Assess this! On a lighter note, I should mention that one of my better students, Jillian, a photographer who had graduated from Bronzeville Military Academy, revealed to our community of critical readers, writers and creators that because it was SO hard for her to pay for art school, she was going to sign up for military service semester’s end so her college tuition would be paid for. I first talked privately with her about her decision, cautioning the haste that she was using to make such a huge decision, especially at a time when the U.S. was at war on three fronts – Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya. Then, with her permission, I asked if we could bring the issue to our class community. She said, “Sure.” We did. While many others were also suffering economically, none of her peers thought joining the Army was the way to go. Well, while this may not show up on a quantitative assessment sheet, I’m pleased to say I just heard from Jillian and she WILL return to Columbia in the Fall to shoot with her camera not with her rifle. Maybe we saved Jillian’s life and she surely helped enrich ours. In our class, that’s how we define community.<http://cms.colum.edu/cte/2010/12/meet_the_faculty_4.php>