Exploring Empathy

IN A DESIGN LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY
OUR STORY
Flagstaff, Arizona
Population: 66,000
Northern Arizona University student population: 21,200
Envisioned, proposed and implemented the plan in 2007 as an elective class, evolving into a topic class and it is now a regular class in the curriculum.

First intention: Internship opportunity in a scarce environment

Now: Motivate students towards social responsibility and action.

Building experiences
Creating awareness of local causes
Supporting policy change
Cultivate creative confidence
Engage in interdisciplinary collaboration
Inspiring design thinkers and doers
Our Community Partner

A New Dawn AZ is a non-profit organization formed by Pearl Rawls and Macy Mouritsen, to increase access to comprehensive and restorative dental services for the uninsured and under-insured adult and aging population in Northern Arizona. “A New Dawn aims to fill the oral health service gaps in Flagstaff and the surrounding communities.”

I will use one project in particular to share observation on how empathy provides the grounds for a successful collaboration between students and client. Design that supports and enhance people’s lives and provide long-term positive impact in our community.
TREATMENT IS PROVIDED AT NO COST TO INDIVIDUALS WHO CANNOT ACCESS OR AFFORD DENTAL CARE

NATIONWIDE, MORE THAN 40% OF ADULTS HAVE UNTREATED TOOTH DECAY;
ONE-THIRD OF THOSE 65 OR OLDER HAVE LOST ALL OF THEIR TEETH
44% OF ADULTS LIVING IN ARIZONA DO NOT HAVE DENTAL INSURANCE (ARIZONA DENTAL ASSOCIATION)

POOR ORAL HEALTH NEGATIVELY AFFECTS EATING, SPEAKING, SELF-ESTEEM, AND EMPLOYABILITY
SMILING

Improve your mood: relieves endorphins
Make others happy – Smiling is literally contagious.
Make you look younger
Build better relationships
Makes you approachable
EMPATHY
“When our work intersects with societal needs, we realize the potential for our work to both BE and DO good.”

Christopher Simmons - Just Design

EMPATHY
Not as a first step of a Design thinking methodology, but as a deeper connection, where relationships are built between the design student, client/partner, and professor.

Working with Community Partner
Engaging in interdisciplinary collaboration with our local community brings to the student a sense of belonging that automatically affects their future and professional outcome.

VALUE BASED WORK, A catalyst for change
Enables relationships, curiosity, inspiration, meaning, and connection.
Case Study

“My life feels enriched”, I can make a difference with the thing I love the most!

Students reported that service learning had shown them how to be more involved in their communities; helped them have a better understanding of their role as active community members.

Work with Meaning:
Engages students across disciplines, providing experiences that dissolve the classroom walls and help launch them into a responsible practice.
“This course has made me excited to have such an effect on a community. I hope to be able to work with nonprofits in the future as I am inspired by those who want to truly benefit and help others. They make me want to do the same with design”

“I never had the opportunity to do such intimate work with a client that I knew would be changing lives, that is a feeling I will chase and strive for throughout my career”
Creating a community to be a part of

When students are able to not only understand deeply the effects of their work on society, but are also able to create a deep emotional connection to the inspiring work of the people behind the organization they are working with,

magic happens!
PAST: Community Partnership
Theatre students and Faculty–Actors, Directors, Scene Designers

Student Designers: JESSICA TENNYNSON, SEAN WILSON
Collaboration: Environ. Journalism, Creative Media & Film and University College

STUDENT DESIGNERS: ANDREW MORACA, KEVIN HOUCK AND MONICA SAATY
Qualities of Attention: Collaboration with NAU Psychological Sciences Professor Dr. Andrew Gardner

Student Designers: ESTEBAN VALENZUELA DUNN, JARED FULLER, COREY BEGAY
It doesn’t matter how large the project is or even how vast the impact, what matters is how engaged you are with choosing to affect change.
Thank You

Visual DESIGN Lab – Spring 16