



TRACS – Civic Engagement & Service Learning

BOOKS

Building Opportunities for Our Kids and Seniors

BOOKS combines high impact pedagogical approaches (i.e., service-learning, domestic study-away, and storytelling) to create a new course that is offered through the Transdisciplinary Course Program at the University of Tübingen. The course aims to strengthen students' understanding of issues pertaining to socioeconomic and educational justice impacting underserved children and seniors in Germany, and to bridge generational gaps through community service, storytelling, and bookmaking. It is co-designed with community partners, lecturers and students to prioritize their needs and support the learning outcomes.

The course is offered in three phases: (1) preparation, (2) civic engagement placement (domestic study-away), and (3) reflection:

Phase 1: Students explore issues pertaining to social and educational justice impacting children and senior population in Germany. This phase is co-facilitated with community partners to prepare students for Phase 2 where students connect theory with practice to deepen the knowledge gained in Phase 1 and enhance their civic engagement experience in Phase 2.

Phase 2: Students travel for a week-long visit to a community organization to work directly with socioeconomically disadvantaged children or seniors. In this phase, students engage in literacy/art projects that include storytelling through writing, drawing and bookmaking.

Phase 3: Students discuss their learnings and reflect on their placement experiences. Their reflections together with the stories of children and seniors will be published in an anthology for further dissemination.

BOOKS' uniqueness lies in leveraging storytelling as an educational tool to bridge generational (as well as disciplinary) divides and provide a common language and framework for students to understand complex socioeconomical challenges that make certain populations vulnerable. BOOKS also breaks the 'academic bubble' by sending students to regions with underserved demographics. This is especially relevant to Tübingen, a resource-rich university city with one-third of the residents associated with the university, and a significant influence on the local socio-economic landscape.

Parallel to the development and implementation of the course, an evaluation strategy is co-created together with community partners and students to assess all activities, impacts and learning outcomes. This involves organizing an evaluation workshop in the initial phase of the project, with follow-up meetings during the project timeline to monitor the evaluation strategy and make necessary adjustments.

An important aspect of the BOOKS project is the sustainable development of networks with and between practice partner organisations and students. This involves identifying and connecting with local and national partners and placements that align with the project goals, and organizing a workshop with the community partners and students to co-create a shared set of principles for successful, equitable partnerships appropriate for the design and implementation of the project.