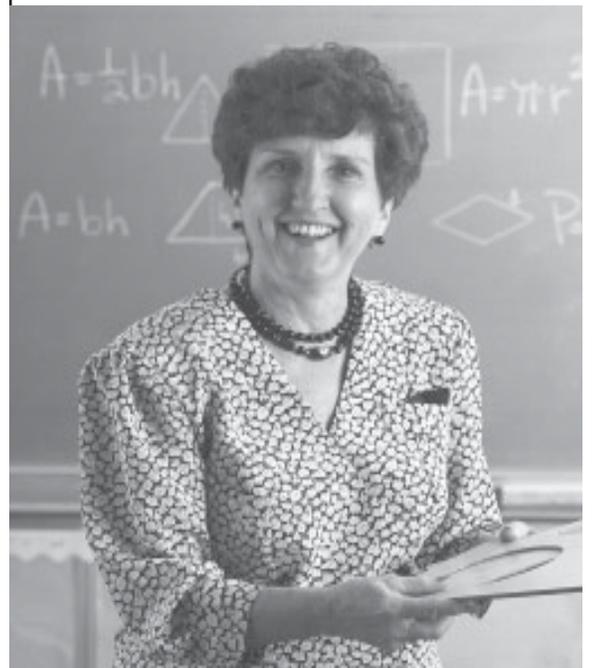


SECTION I
UNDERSTANDING
SERVICE-LEARNING



Academic and Community Based Service-Learning

Over the years, academic service-learning has gained acceptance within schools as an effective teaching methodology. Academic service-learning focuses on providing academic instruction through service experiences. It connects classroom learning and community service, actually using the service as a context for teaching. But, more recently, service-learning has expanded beyond the focus of the academic gains and has been incorporated into community based settings. Community based organizations that were exposed to service-learning through partnerships with service-learning students from schools began to see the potential for service-learning in community based settings but were, obviously, not connected directly to the classroom or the curriculum. Organizations began to look for ways to adopt the principles of service-learning but for a non-classroom setting. A new understanding of service-learning began to emerge. Community Based Service-Learning targets the same overall goals as academic service-learning but from a different perspective, focusing on service while supporting that service with clear learning goals.

Academic Service-Learning

Because of the number of practitioners academic based service-learning has been addressed in a number of contexts. Even so, academic service-learning is defined differently by various advocates. However, all definitions of academic service-learning include some fundamental components. Here are several definitions offered by national service-learning organizations.

The National and Community Service Act of 1990 describes excellent service-learning programs as featuring the following:

1. Students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service experiences that meet actual community needs and are coordinated with the school and the community;
2. Students are provided with the opportunity to use newly acquired skills and knowledge in real life situations in their own communities;
3. Service-learning enhances what schools teach by extending student learning beyond the classroom and into the community, thereby helping to foster the development of a sense of caring for others.

The National Youth Leadership Council (NYLC) defines academic service-learning like this: Service-learning is an educational method that involves students in challenging tasks that meet genuine community needs and requires the application of knowledge, skills and systematic reflection on the experience.

According to NYLC these are the essential components of service-learning. It is an educational method, a way of teaching. Students are engaged in

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challenging tasks. These activities meet genuine community needs. The activity requires preparation (knowledge) and application (skill implementation) and involves an intentionally designed reflection process.

The National Service-Learning Cooperative states that “Service-learning is a teaching and learning method that connects meaningful community service experience with academic learning, personal growth, and civic responsibility”. Here service-learning is also defined as a method of teaching and learning. In addition, this definition also includes personal growth and introduces the element of civic responsibility.

The National Center for Education Statistics defines service-learning as “curriculum-based community service”.

The Office of Academic Service-Learning at Eastern Michigan University defines Academic Service-Learning as “a teaching methodology that utilizes community service as a means of helping students gain a deeper understanding of course objectives, acquire new knowledge, and engage in civic activity.” (2001)

Community Based Service-Learning

Community based service-learning is a philosophy of service that intentionally enhances the learning opportunities by incorporating specific learning goals and structured reflection activities into the service experience. While fulfilling the mission of an organization through the use of volunteers, opportunities for academic and skill development are identified and designed into the service. These lessons are reinforced through an effective practice known as Reflection. In this way the strength and benefit of service-learning can transform the activity from simply service to service with life long lessons. Organizations benefit from volunteers who are more committed and more deeply engaged in the work of meeting the organization’s mission.

Three Defining Characteristics

The fact that there are differences in definitions is not unusual as service-learning is applied in various setting to meet a variety of needs. And, although there are many definitions of service-learning, and many factors that contribute to high quality practice, there are three essential, or defining, characteristics of service-learning that virtually all definitions contain. It is the presence of these common elements that distinguishes service-learning from other hands-on and project-based learning experiences. First, service-learning must have:

CLEAR LEARNING OBJECTIVES. As the concept and practice of service learning expands to include a number of settings outside the traditional classroom the focus must still remain on learning opportunities. Learning must be an intentional and important component. Secondly, service-learning must:

MEET GENUINE COMMUNITY NEEDS. The strength of service-learning is that learning is utilized to make a real difference. It is in the genuineness of the work involved that young people find the power of learning. Finally, service-learning is defined by the presence of

SYSTEMATIC REFLECTION. One of the most powerful and important components of high impact service-learning is reflection. Rather than being viewed as a summary of activity, reflection is understood to be an effective form of teaching which, when coupled with clear learning objectives and genuine community need, has the power to not only strengthen both service and learning but has the power to transform the learner and teacher as well.

Three Additional Essential Elements

In addition the three defining characteristics, Clear Learning Objectives, Genuine Community Need and Systematic Reflection, three additional elements are essential for high quality, high impact service-learning. These essential elements are

YOUTH VOICE: The inclusion of youth voice as an integral component of high quality service-learning practice is important for several reasons. First, youth voice heightens the importance and relevance of the service for the young people if they have a say in what service will be provided, to whom, and how it will be performed. Secondly, youth voice strengthens buy-in on the part of the young people as well as commitment to the project and the service. Youth voice can also impact the probability that a young person will continue to volunteer beyond the service-learning project.

SIGNIFICANT SERVICE: While meeting a genuine community need defines service-learning, providing significant service strengthens the impact. Even if a service-learning activity targets a genuine need the service provided by young people is not always significant, either in the service itself or with regards to the outcome. When this occurs young people may feel like they are merely free labor.

PARTNERSHIPS: Service-learning built on strong partnerships not only strengthens the impact of the activity for both participants and recipients, but partnerships have a direct impact on service-learning sustainability.

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The Benefits of Service-Learning

During the past ten years numerous studies have been conducted on the effects of service-learning on a wide range of factors including: academic performance, school environment, personal development, issues related to diversity, the effect on at-risk behaviors, violence, community involvement, responsibility and many other areas. The following excerpts are statements from various research findings regarding the Impacts of Service-learning. A complete listing of the studies from which these findings are taken as well as a complete research bibliography are available.

Service-Learning and Academic Achievement

Research has clearly demonstrated a direct correlation between student participation in service-learning programs and increased student performance in a number of academic areas.

- Participating students consistently scored higher on standardized tests as well as on other basic skill tests.
- Improvements were evident especially in reading, language arts, and math. Service-learning involving tutoring other students was especially effective in increasing academic performance.
- Studies also link participation in service-learning to increased improvement in various problem-solving skills and on outcomes involving complexity of understanding, problem analysis, critical thinking and cognitive development.

Involvement in high quality service-learning results in an increase in students' ability to apply what they learned to the "real world". In addition, higher grades and increased grade point averages were evident among service-learning students. Students who were involved in high quality service-learning programs demonstrated an increase in measures of school engagement, increased sense of educational accomplishment and even demonstrated an increase in the amount of homework completed. Students came to class on time more often and there was a significant reduction in absenteeism among students involved in service-learning programs.

Service-Learning and School Environment

The research on service-learning also shows a positive effect on school environment in general.

- In addition to increased student attendance, teachers and students both reported an increase in mutual respect.

- Students reported stronger relationships with faculty and other caring adults.
- Students also observed more positive peer relations among students.

Participants also reported a more positive school climate as a result of feeling a greater connection to the school. Service-learning also had the unexpected result of reducing teacher turnover and increasing greater teacher collegiality. Both connected with an increased overall satisfaction in the level of student learning.

Service-Learning and Personal Development

The research regarding the impact of service-learning on an individual student's personal development is extensive.

- Middle and high schools students showed an increase in measures of personal and social responsibility, communications, and a sense of educational competence.
- Students ranked responsibility as a more important value.
- They also reported a higher sense of responsibility to their school than the control group.

Students also perceived themselves as more socially competent after participating in service-learning. Students' sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy increased. As a result, behavioral problems decreased.

Service-Learning and At Risk Behavior

In addition to the positive increases, service-learning has been connected to substantial reductions in "at-risk" behaviors.

- Studies show a clear reduction in levels of alienation among participating students, a factor often attributed to serious at-risk behaviors.
- Referrals to the office for discipline measures were less likely among service-learning participants.
- Drug and alcohol use and abuse were also reduced among students in service-learning programs.

Studies also show that students who engaged in service-learning were less likely to be involved in behaviors that lead to pregnancy and activities resulting in arrest.

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Service-Learning and Violence

Research has shown that service-learning research contributes to an overall reduction of violent behavior among participating youth. The positive effects of

- increased self-esteem,
- a greater sense of connection to others,
- and an attitude of caring

all contribute to the reduction of violence.

Service-Learning and Diversity

Numerous studies have shown that service-learning also has a positive effect on issues related to diversity.

- Reducing stereotypes and facilitating cultural and racial understanding
- Helps to foster interpersonal development and
- Increases the ability to work well with others.

Students involved reported greater acceptance of cultural diversity. This acceptance of others extended to the elderly and the disabled.

Service-Learning and Community and Civic Involvement

Service-learning clearly has a positive effect on a student's sense of social responsibility and civic involvement.

- Students felt that they had a greater awareness of community needs,
- Possessed a more sophisticated understanding of socio-historical contexts,
- Were more likely to think about politics and morality in society, and
- Considered how to effect social change.
- Students in service-learning feel that they can make a difference in their community.

Adult members of the community reported that after participating with youth in service-learning that they placed a higher value on youth. Adults see youth involved in service-learning as valuable resources and positive contributors to the community.

One of the greatest strengths of service-learning, as the research clearly demonstrates, is its ability to support and positively impact so many different areas. The positive impact that service-learning has is not limited to academics but extends even beyond academic achievement to positively affect personal development. But the impact doesn't stop there. Service-learning also has a tremendous impact on the overall health of the community as well.

Service-Learning vs. Community Service

Although there are significant similarities between service-learning and community service, there are some critical differences that must be recognized. The distinct elements of service-learning are what make it an effective educational tool. Without this understanding, service-learning will face some difficulty in acceptance by teachers and other stakeholders in education.

The goal of community service, for the most part, is the service provided. The task completed is the primary outcome objective. Whether it is an environmental preservation project, building walking trails through a city park area or a voter registration campaign, the primary objective is the service rendered. Personal enrichment and education are secondary by-products. Even if no significant learning occurs the completed community service project would still be a worthwhile endeavor.

With service-learning, on the other hand, every aspect of the experience is tailored to teach. It is designed intentionally to include "the application of knowledge, skills and systematic reflection on the experience." Service-learning is intentional education, intentional enrichment, with the outcome objective being the improvement of the individual student involved. With service-learning the service rendered, however significant, is secondary. The focus in service-learning is on the academic development, personal growth and overall enrichment of the individual participants involved. This shift in focus to the individual benefits in no way diminishes the value of the service activity performed. Rather it maximizes the effectiveness of each service opportunity by expanding the scope of the outcomes to benefit the service providers as well as the recipients.

This distinction of intentional education is what sets service-learning apart from simple community service. A University of Maryland at Baltimore study, "The Effect Of Community Service On Self Esteem And Academic Performance of At Risk Youth" (Bambry, 1993) concluded "...it is unrealistic to expect improvements in academic performance unless there is specific academic component(s) within the community service program" (*italics added*). While both programs can enhance and develop self esteem, it is the inclusion of these academic components that sets service-learning apart as an effective tool for academic improvement.

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Although community service and other valuable experiential learning activities are similar, it is this linking of community service to the classroom instruction that makes this type of learning personally meaningful and educationally vital.

Service-Learning as a Teaching Methodology

Tying Service and Learning Together To Meet Academic Standards

Approaching service-learning as a teaching methodology has the advantage of being able to accommodate virtually any service project without having to replace existing curriculum. Instead this approach utilizes traditional instructional materials and goals and then incorporates various aspects of a service project to create a framework for teaching and reinforcing core curriculum classroom instruction.

Adopting service-learning as a teaching methodology does not require adding additional curriculum that must replace other instructional material. Instead, it directly links virtually any service project to current, existing academic goals, outcomes and standards. With this approach the actual service performed, providing it meets a genuine community need, is not nearly as important as the academic connections that can be made. Incorporating service provides teachers the flexibility to incorporate any service as a tool for instructional reinforcement and still target essential learning requirements.

One of the many advantages of this method is that it allows students the opportunity to get personally involved in exploring the needs of their own community and the ability to generate their own ideas for a service project that meets those needs. This creates significant student buy-in and personal investment, which greatly increases the level of ownership and commitment to the community service project. This, in turn, greatly improves the overall impact of both the service and the learning.

By adopting service-learning as a teaching methodology instead of a teaching unit, teachers gain the ability to incorporate valuable service as an instructional tool without having to sacrifice any necessary core subject instruction or find room for other instructional material in order to take advantage of the benefits of service-learning. By utilizing service-learning principles as a teaching methodology even a seemingly ordinary service can be infused with learning. Consider the following scenario:

Katie's grandmother had moved to a nursing home following a fall that left her with a broken hip. At first when Katie would visit she felt awkward and uncomfortable, the odors were strong and often quite unpleasant. The people were so old and to Katie they appeared disfigured, almost grotesque. Frequently, residents would try to talk with her, moaned at her really, and Katie sped uncomfortably on by. Sometimes a resident would reach out and try to

grab her as she passed. She was always careful to keep her eyes fixed forward. But then, gradually, her discomfort began to subside. Eventually, she hardly noticed the things that had overwhelmed her such a short time earlier.

In time Katie learned some names: Gracie, Shirley, George, Ben, and Mary. She got to know their personalities, who was cranky and who was pleasant. “Hi Gracie” she would shout as she passed by on the way to see her grandmother. Ben, stationed always in the same spot in the hallway, would, with great difficulty, raise his hand from the arm of his wheelchair and she would gently squeeze it as she passed. Glancing over her shoulder she looked to catch the smile that always brightened his face following their brief encounter. She had come to know and even love the members of her grandmother’s new extended family. Nothing brought that awareness home more than the day that she passed by Gracie’s room and, to Katie’s horror, Gracie’s bed was gone. Katie would miss her deeply.

Katie had discovered the power of service, the impact that one person, even a young person, could make in the lives of others. She also discovered the impact that serving others has on the life of the one serving. She had been changed, too. Katie had discovered the impact and the rewards of community service. And, if the story ended there it would have been a wonderful story of a young person brightening the hearts of individuals in an often disheartening place. But the story goes on.

Katie’s eighth grade teachers had been introduced to a teaching methodology called service-learning. Katie was already doing the service, so what would it take to transform her activity into a service-learning experience? As Katie’s teachers had learned, not a great deal. Basically, all it takes for any service to be tied to an academic learning experience is to apply a concept called “PAR for the course”.

So, how would Katie’s teachers transform her situation from mere (though very valuable) service to an academic experience? Let’s assume for the sake of this example that every single one of Katie’s teachers wanted to work with her on this project. Each teacher would look at the activity and design core curriculum applications that fit neatly with this particular service.

Because service-learning adapts so well to achieving high academic standards we will use the Washington State - Essential Academic Learning Requirements as subject areas. They include:

Reading, Writing, Communications, Math, History, Geography, Science, Civics, Economics, Arts, and Health and fitness. All of these essential academic learning requirements can be represented in this one example. Applying service-learning principles to each of the core subject areas might look something like this.

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Making Academic Connections

Making academic connections to service-learning projects requires the intentional introduction of specific learning outcomes that can be generated in connection to any service activity. In this example the links will be to each of the specific academic standards areas. Service is the framework. It provides the structure. Essential academic learning requirements provide the target. The specific assignments provide the pathway. A brief treatment of the possible subject paths to accomplish the particular essential learning outcomes might look something like this:

Reading: Katie's reading assignments will include articles and essays regarding aging and the associated problems and concerns. The teacher will assign specific essays or Katie can find these by using research methods including Internet research. Katie also will begin a reading time with the residents where she reads aloud to them each week.

Writing: Katie will begin the project with an essay regarding her first contact with the residents and her impressions. The title of the essay will be "What it means to be old". This essay will be filed with the teacher and forms a companion to the final reflective essay by the same title. Katie will keep a journal of her observations, her interactions and even the comings and goings of various residents.

Communications: Katie will choose one or two residents (one should be her grandmother) and formally interview them about their lives. Questions will be considered and written down in advance and reviewed by the instructor. Answers will be recorded, preferably on a tape machine and later transcribed. (Also links to history)

Math: Katie's assignment will be to determine the average age of all of the residents at the facility. She will also address the costs associated with nursing care facilities. Along with the teacher Katie will develop a survey, which will yield statistical information for this particular facility that can be charted and graphed. (Also links to economics)

Science: Katie will study a human development unit on the aging process, problems and concerns. She will study the popular research on Alzheimer's disease.

History: Katie will study a history unit on the twentieth century with special emphasis on the Depression, WW2, and technological advances. First hand information regarding these (or any other) historical periods and events will be obtained. One oral history (preferably for her own family) will be generated, developed into a printed presentation and given to the family. (Also links to English)

Geography: Katie will discover the birth and childhood places of as many residents as possible and plot them on a map that can be placed in the hallway of the facility. She also will glean personal observations and information on as many areas as possible. This information will be organized as a travel brochure presented along with the highlighted map. (Also links to Arts and History)

Civics: Katie will discover who advocates for the elderly? What are the particular political concerns facing them. Katie will organize a voting campaign within the facility to insure voter participation for those able to do so. This campaign could extend to the elderly in the community as well. Katie could also do a project entitled “What Democracy Means to Me” based on formal interviews with residents. This could be a video production. (Also links to Arts and Communications and History)

Economics: Katie will research the costs involved in aging. What financial problems face those on fixed incomes? What does it cost to stay in a full-care nursing facility? What about assisted living? How do the elderly afford these costs? (Also links to Math)

Arts: Katie’s project in arts is to enhance the environment of the facility through various forms of visual display and through a variety of musical presentations. She will introduce art through visual displays, either by creating or supplying artwork that will brighten the environment and provide artistic presentations. These presentations could include expressions like flower arrangements. Musically, if Katie is in band or choir she will arrange student performances. She will schedule other musicians for performances. If possible, she will personally perform for the residents. She will also research the various styles of music that the residents enjoy and provide listening times. (Research links to English and History)

Health and Fitness: Katie will study the health-related issues involved with aging, particularly age related diseases such as arthritis and osteoporosis. She will research possible health practices for reducing the negative impact of aging on the body and mind. She will discuss with a physical therapist exercises that can be safely performed by the elderly and lead an exercise class once a week. (Also links to Science)

Obviously, most service-learning projects will not include every essential learning requirement for a single student at one time. More often service-learning projects will focus on only a few of the academic learning essentials. Nevertheless, one simple community service project (like visiting a nursing-care facility) could generate academic application in every single essential learning area. These are presented simply to demonstrate the types of possibilities available with almost any service activity.

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Clear connections always essential to successful teaching and learning. This is especially true with learning that is contained within service. Making connections is the process of exploring the possibilities presented by a service opportunity and intentionally using that service to also accomplish and reinforce academic goals. Making connections is the largest single component of successful service-learning. Ultimately, it views service as a springboard to a variety of educational opportunities.

Service-learning is one of those unique educational experiences where the benefits are shared by all who are involved: the students, the teachers, the schools, the community and certainly those who are served. It reinforces academic instruction in a powerful way. It moves learning beyond the limits of textbooks and the walls of the school and transfers it into the expanded classroom, life. It helps to promote not only lifelong learning, but a lifetime of community service as well. Adopting service-learning as a teaching methodology allows education and application to be combined into a learning process that not only reinforces classroom instruction but demonstrates real learning in meeting genuine community needs.