

S E C O N D E D I T I O N

Service Learning

A Guide to Planning, Implementing, and Assessing Student Projects

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Introduction

WHAT IS SERVICE LEARNING?

Service learning is in-context learning that connects specific educational goals with meaningful community service. Service learning projects include a dual focus: the goals of academic learning and the goals of authentic volunteer projects. Students learn course content, processes, and skills, strengthening their thinking skills as they develop empathy, personal ethics, and the habit of helping their communities. Doing service learning helps students understand their connectedness to and importance in their communities as they experience the role of service provider (rather than the role of service receiver).

John Dewey, William Kilpatrick, and other experts associated with the progressive education movement of the early 1900s argued that this experience helps students see the usefulness of their classroom learning in solving community problems (Titlebaum, Williamson, Daprano, Baer, & Brahler, 2004). More recently, Wigginton (1985), Goodlad (1984), and Boyer (1983) advocated using community service projects to promote social reform. As students do service learning projects, they not only experience learning, they experience a commitment to doing meaningful and authentic work, a sense of empowerment and joy in doing service that needs to be done, and a sense of community that results in providing help to others.

WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF SERVICE LEARNING?

In 1903, John Dewey with his students and colleagues published a number of papers that established the intellectual foundations of service learning. Dewey, a strong proponent of experiential education, went on to publish *Democracy and Education* (1916) and *Experience and Education* (1938) in which he stated that a person's permanent frame of reference for learning is the "organic connection between education and personal experience" (1938, p. 59), that the most important aspect of any experience was its agreeableness or disagreeableness, which formed the basis of its influence on later experiences, and that to learn from experiences, a person must reflect on them, and they must lead out into "an expanding world of subject matter" (1938, p. 59). Experience with its accompanying reflection, in other words, is the foundation of learning, and service learning immerses students in experiences and encourages them to reflect.

The establishment of the Peace Corps by President John F. Kennedy in 1961 and the creation of VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964 renewed enthusiasm for public service in the United States. In 1967,

Robert Sigmon and William Ramsey, educators who were working with the Manpower Development Internship Program in Atlanta, coined the term “service learning” to identify the essence of that program. The term, as the two educators explained it, implies a value consideration. It implies a link between authentic community service, intentional academic learning, and reflection. Service learning, as defined by Sigmon and Ramsey, has a value-added component because the learning takes place in the context of experience that makes a constructive, positive contribution to the community (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999). This definition is a key to clarifying service learning as a distinct curriculum model.

The National Student Volunteer Program, established in the early 1970s, began publishing *The Syntegist*, a journal linking academic learning and community service. In 1979, the NSVP, now named the National Center for Service-Learning, published Robert Sigmon’s principles of service learning, which stressed the reciprocal nature of the experience. According to Sigmon, this experiential learning is “reciprocal”: Both those who provide a service and those who receive it learn from the service. Unless that reciprocity exists, an experience is not true service learning. More recently, the term has been used with a variety of experiential education programs ranging from volunteer and community service projects to internships (Furco, n.d.). A thread that links Dewey with Sigmon and Ramsey and those who followed them is the need for structured time for reflection to, as Dewey would say, lead students out into an expanding world of facts, information, or ideas. For example, theorist David Kolb’s learning cycle includes concrete experience and reflection (*Completing the Learning Cycle*, n.d.). Reflection is the key to making sense out of the experience.

At the historic Wingspread Conference, hosted in 1989 by the Johnson Foundation in Racine, Wisconsin, experienced service learning practitioners drew on what they had learned to draft *The Principles of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning*. Teachers and other leaders of service learning projects have used these principles to develop effective programs and projects in their schools and communities. Other more recent milestones in the development of this experiential learning model include the endorsement of service learning by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) in 1993; the establishment in 1994 of the *Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning* (the first refereed service learning journal that is committed to developing and sustaining the integrity of the model); the establishment of the AmeriCorps program in 1994, which provides many communities and schools with in-house service learning volunteers; the 1997 founding of the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse at the University of Minnesota; the first International Conference on Service-Learning Research in Berkeley, California, in 2001; and the adoption by several states and individual school districts of service learning requirements for graduation from middle or high school. Teachers who want more information about the history of this curriculum model or its principles and applications can find information online using Google or Yahoo! and the key words “service learning,” “principles,” “pioneers,” and “history.”

WHY DO SERVICE LEARNING?

Service learning strengthens students in many different ways. Students who learn to do for others rather than “being done for” by others become more self-confident and

develop more self-esteem. They feel that they are useful members of the community who can identify problems, propose solutions, act independently in implementing solutions, and open themselves to new experiences and roles as they do so. Students gain self-respect as they develop the real-life skills of being on the job on time, having good attendance, and doing the work that they have promised to do (Billig, 2004). Often, as they discover that mistakes are opportunities for problem solving, brainstorming, and growth, students learn to treat others as they themselves want to be treated, to have empathy for the problems and concerns of others, and to defer gratification as they work toward long-term goals. Students who learn these components of emotional intelligence are more successful throughout their lives (Goleman, 1995).

Because service projects are done in conjunction with others in the community, students improve their communication and cooperation skills. As they work with people who represent a cross section of the community, they gain respect and appreciation for people from socioeconomic, ethnic, and cultural groups other than their own. They feel the inner joy, warmth, and satisfaction that come from giving to others and being accepted by others (Holdsmen & Tuchmann, 2004). Service learning is brain-compatible learning. Because the learning is done in a real-world context, students' brains construct meaning from the learning and remember it effortlessly (Fogarty, 1997a). Students are able to recall the learning easily, especially when they revisit the original learning circumstances and locations. Furthermore, students experiencing service learning are able to update their learnings with little effort. The brain learns best when feelings are "in balance," and students feel happy, trusted, included, empowered, independent, and capable as they do service learning projects. These emotions trigger the mid-brain to produce a variety of hormones that brain researchers believe to be memory fixatives, so the positive emotions that the students feel result in more learning that is remembered longer (Jensen, 1996).

When asked about the impact of service learning on their thoughts, students in Saint Paul offered the following ideas:

- They learned how to network and how important networks are to everyday life.
- They realized how complex and interconnected issues can be.
- They discovered that they do have the power to change the world.

—(Johnson, M., 2001, p. 6)

In general, learners are motivated when they are given some choices about what to learn and how to learn it. Students doing service learning participate in choosing and managing the projects. They have some control over what service project they do, how the project is structured, when they work on it, and how long the project will last. Students, therefore, feel motivated to learn; these affirmative feelings lead to more effective learning of content as well as skill (Billig, 2004).

What about the belief, often stated as if it were fact, that residents in most communities want their schools to go "back to the basics" and take a traditional approach to teaching language arts, social studies, mathematics, science, and other

content? A poll conducted in 2000 by Roper Starch Worldwide for the WK Kellogg Foundation and the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation found that while the vast majority of respondents want and expect schools to furnish students with the academic content, process, and skill knowledge that they need for future success, they also believe that schools need to link that academic learning to the skills that students need to be successful in the workplace and in their communities (*Service-Learning Delivers*, n.d.). When teachers or project leaders explain the philosophy and process of service learning to community residents, they support the model and recognize its benefits to the community, the service providers, and the service recipients. As the title of the National Service-Learning Partnership article says so well, “Service learning delivers what Americans want from schools.”

HOW DOES SERVICE LEARNING WORK?

There is no one set formula for structuring successful service learning projects. Most projects do, however, share common elements. All of the service learning projects in this book include these elements:

1. *Selecting the need for service.* Before doing any detailed project planning, teacher and students need to gather information about the services that the community needs, the appropriateness of students helping with those services, and the interest that students have in the project. A rubric that students and teacher can use in evaluating these and other factors is included in Chapter 1. Students and teacher must put thought into selecting a project that balances student interest, community need, and authentic learning.
2. *Finding a community partner.* The teacher may be aware of some pro-education leaders of community service agencies. Students can ask their parents for information about possible community partners. When students are involved with contacting potential partners, participating in interviews, setting up schedules and agendas, and discussing responsibilities, they learn more about problem solving, decision making, and cooperative action.
3. *Aligning the service experience with educational goals.* Recent research indicates that one of the most important components of successful service learning experiences is strong alignment with curriculum standards (Billig, 2004). The teacher helps students maintain awareness of the content learning that is embedded in the service learning project. As students do reflective journal entries, the teacher focuses their attention on service goals and content standards.
4. *Managing the project.* Developing a project management plan is a complex process that requires creativity, flexibility, and common sense. Chapter 1 includes a detailed discussion of this process. When students and teacher plan together, the brainstorming is more likely to produce a comprehensive plan. Frequent assessment, review, and revision of the plan keep a project on course.
5. *Fostering reflective student learning throughout the project.* Each project in Chapters 2–10 in this book includes a portfolio list detailing tools and techniques

that students can use to document their actions and learning. As students do reflective journal entries, the teacher focuses their attention on service goals and content standards. Using these tools, students reflect on learning in many areas: academic content, processes and skills, community service, interpersonal understanding, and intrapersonal growth. Students can ask their parents for information about possible community partners. The more often students step back and reflect on what they are learning, what it means, and how it connects to new arenas, the richer the service learning experience becomes.

One benefit (to students of doing service learning) is that they became aware of their community. We are a very small school (approximately 275 students) where students are not often aware of their surroundings. The second benefit would be that they developed a sense of understanding and compassion. They were able to look outside their lives and realize some of the hardships that students face on a daily basis. The third benefit, and perhaps the most important, is that they became a part of the community. I can't express in words how enlightening it is to have students from a small community realize that they can become part of the "big picture." It's important for them to see that their voices matter and that they can make a difference in the lives of others.

—Stephanie Smith, AmeriCorps Volunteer, Ionia, Michigan

WHO ARE THE KEY PLAYERS IN A SERVICE LEARNING PROJECT?

Along with individual students and a teacher or project mentor, each service learning project involves some individual or agency from the community. Units of government such as the police department, the office of streets and sanitation, or the parks department often partner with students. Civic organizations such as a merchants' association, chamber of commerce, a municipal development authority, or a beautification agency are possible partners. Service organizations such as the Elks or Lions Club or a food pantry, soup kitchen, or homeless shelter are often willing partners. The partner may be a business entity like a local hospital or elder care home. Sometimes the agency participates in the project; at other times, it is an absentee manager. The agency sometimes helps students with funding, planning, and execution; at other times, it is simply the project administrator. The agency is involved in the project in various ways, depending on the nature of the project and the need for agency involvement.

At the beginning of the project, the teacher identifies the educational goals of the service learning project and the content concepts, processes, and skills that help students reach those goals. Also, the teacher discusses those goals, concepts, and skills with the students and structures the service learning project to ensure their safety. Teachers verify that adequate supervision is always available, and they make arrangements for students to be transported or escorted to and from the service site.

The Fundamentals of Service Learning as a Curriculum Model

HOW DOES SERVICE LEARNING WORK?

There are many successful models for doing service learning. Robin Fogarty (1997b) suggests that they all have the following elements or steps in common:

- Selecting the need for service
- Finding a community partner
- Aligning the service experience with educational goals
- Managing the project or program
- Fostering reflective student learning throughout the process

The order of these elements often varies from project to project. The teacher may identify a curricular goal, such as learning the importance of exercising for fitness, and ask students to decide how they can help other children obtain specialized exercise equipment (i.e., ice skates or in-line skates) that children rapidly outgrow. Students and teacher discuss the value of “recycling” usable equipment through the community rather than letting it gather dust in the back of a garage. For another service project, a student may suggest that a local food pantry or soup kitchen needs more volunteers. Then the students and teacher identify nutrition and food preparation goals that tie content learning to volunteer work at a local community food pantry or kitchen.

All service learning projects in this book use the five elements mentioned above and serve to make community service projects the context for curricular learning. In addition, project (Chapters 2–10) involves teacher and students in a frequent

review of both the service goals and the content learning goals to see how well students are meeting those goals. A chart showing such alignment is provided for each project.

Selecting the Need for Service

As students and teachers explore service learning opportunities, they begin by finding out what service needs exist in the community and how to go about offering their services. Students can discover what is already being done in the community by talking with their parents, teachers, neighbors, members of service organizations, and religious leaders in the community. Networking further, students can consult with the community relations contact person from a local hospital or elder care facility or from the police, fire, or community service department within the municipality. In addition, students can look for service organization announcements printed in the local newspaper or broadcast on the local television or radio station. Regularly watching the community “bulletin board announcements” that often are part of local-access cable television channels provides further leads on community needs.

As a result of such research, students are able to identify and locate

- Community food pantries or soup kitchens that need volunteers to make food baskets or prepare meals for the needy
- Hospitals or elder care facilities in the area that need volunteers to deliver mail or visit patients
- Municipal agencies that need help in keeping streets clean or parks landscaped
- Counseling services or help (phone) line services that need to have funds raised
- Child care agencies that need tutors

Students can also search the Internet for ideas about service learning projects. With adult supervision, students who use a search engine such as Google or Yahoo! and key words “service learning,” “ideas,” “projects,” and “sources” find a wide variety of ideas for projects. Students also are able to find rich material about this model at Web sites for the National Service-Learning Partnership, Learn and Serve, and the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse.

Students and teachers will want to consider a variety of factors before deciding on a service learning project. These factors include interest in the project, need for the service, access to the service site or to necessary funds or materials, age appropriateness of the project work for the students, duration of the service learning project, and the availability of community support. A rubric, such as the one shown in Figure 1.1, can be very helpful to students evaluating the viability of a project. This form is duplicated for the teacher’s convenience in the Reproducible Masters section at the end of this book.

To use the rubric for scoring, the teacher tallies all individual student rankings; then the students compute an average ranking for each of the factors or criteria. For example, if a class of 25 students rates a community soup kitchen project and if the teacher reports that 7 students said that they had *high* interest in the project, 15 students said their interest was *medium*, and 3 students rated their interest as *low*, students then do this set of calculations:

High = 7 students ↔ 1 (ranking)	= 7
Medium = 15 students ↔ 2 (ranking)	= 30
Low = 3 students ↔ 3 (ranking)	= 9
Total ranking score	= 7 + 30 + 9 = 46
Overall ranking	= 46/25 = 1.8

The ranking is closest to *medium* interest in the project.

Students repeat the calculations for each of the other factors. Here are sample results for the soup kitchen project:

Interest	1.8
Need	1.1
Accessibility	1.0 (for an in-school soup kitchen) 1.0 (for an off-site soup kitchen or food pantry with school bus to the site)
Appropriateness	1.3
Time Frame	3+ (all year)

As the teacher and students decide whether or not to do a project, they also will want to discuss the weight or importance of each of the various factors and criteria in the rubric. For the soup kitchen project, the students and teacher may decide that the most important factors are community need, access to the service site, and appropriateness (“fit” or alignment with service project goals and curricular goals). Note that in the scenario above, these three factors all have average ratings close to 1.0, which is the *best* overall rating that students can give. If students and teacher decide that a yearlong time frame really is best for this project because the longer time frame helps the students get feedback about their content and life skills learnings, the teacher and students decide to do the soup kitchen project.