

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 (Holdsmann & 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 teacher may look for parent volunteers who can provide transportation, or the teacher may arrange for school bus transportation.

Students work in teams of three or four at sites away from the school so that every student has a built-in buddy group. Because of the need to provide for the safety of the students, the teachers often prefer service projects that allow the entire class to stay together and work together, especially if students are younger.

The most amazing thing to me is how excited they are about it (service learning). They do one project and they immediately want to come up with another. They take the ideas and fly with them.

The biggest problem has been money. There have been some things we wanted to do that we just didn't have money for. Another teacher is going to help me apply for grant money. That will let us do some things we haven't been able to do.

—Tammy Lancioni, Teacher, Ontonagon, Michigan

HOW DO STUDENTS BENEFIT FROM SERVICE LEARNING?

Service learning experiences expand student learning of content information, life skills, and the service ethic. Brain research says that this kind of in-context learning is deep and is long remembered (Jensen, 1996). Students who do service learning projects demonstrate the increased self-confidence and self-esteem that result from responsible, ethical, independent action. Doing legitimate service projects in the community helps students feel useful (Goleman, 1995). A few generations ago, families needed the service contributions of children to get all of the household and farm work done. Now, with the different structure of today's society and many labor-saving devices present in modern homes, children may not be expected to do as many household chores to contribute to the day-to-day operation of the household.

Used as a curriculum model, service learning lets students have the experience of being needed. As students take on new roles, they become more willing risk takers. They open themselves to new experiences and people. They become more effective leaders, communicators, and teammates. Service learning projects help students develop an awareness and acceptance of others from different ethnic, national, or economic backgrounds. Students become more empathetic and less judgmental, accepting their own internal locus of control and being less likely to blame others or make excuses for shortcomings. They discover that mistakes lead to growth and learning. They grow through their experiences (Billig, 2004).

Service learning projects help students become better learners by enhancing their cognitive skills. Student reflection leads to deeper understanding and more genuine transfer of learning (Billig, 2004). Students become motivated to learn because they make many of the decisions about the service learning projects. This motivation

leads to increased achievement among children, which leads to a belief in themselves as learners and a positive attitude toward learning. Students develop brainstorming and problem-solving skills as they work their way out of mistakes. Because service learning is learning in context, students remember what they learned better and longer, growing educated in the true sense of the word (Ammon, Furco, Chi, & Middaugh, 2002).

Another benefit of the service learning projects presented in this book is that they help students develop a social consciousness and social conscience. Students become more aware of community problems and their responsibility to help solve those problems (Billig, 2004). They recognize their responsibilities as citizens to vote in all elections and to hold elected or volunteer positions in the community. Furthermore, students learn that a community becomes stronger when all of its members work together to solve common problems and share resources, making a difference in building a safe, clean, orderly community. They grow connected.

The meaningful participation that students experience when they are partners in selecting and planning the service learning project helps them develop resiliency, which in turn aids their development into healthy, competent adults (Fredericks, Kaplan, & Zeisler, 2001). Students need to know that their voice is important to the service learning process. When they realize that their contributions are integral to the success of a project, they connect more strongly with it and are more likely to avoid risky behaviors such as substance abuse, misconduct, or dropping out of school (Billig, 2004).

One student in my class, who had behavior problems, was very worried about a family who needed help. I encouraged him to make a plan for positive action, and when the service learning project was successful, he commented on how good he felt, that he never thought he could do something that helpful or important. From that experience on, he was a great kid in class who was respected rather than resented by other kids in the class.

—Gerard O’Brien, Teacher, Palatine, Illinois

Finally, service learning helps students develop real-world skills. Students realize the importance of being on time, of being well groomed, and of being pleasant, polite, and professional in their dealings with others. They discover the importance of doing the job they promised to do, following the rules and directions. They learn to ask for help when they don’t know what to do next and to offer help when they see that someone else needs it. Learning that self-evaluation is strengthening, students find that work can always be improved and that the world of work has its own rules, regulations, and expectations. Growing, responsible students become mature, responsible, ethical members of their communities. Figure 0.1 summarizes this and the other benefits of engaging students in service learning projects.

Figure 0.1 Benefits of the Service Learning Curriculum Model

<p>Content learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-context learning • Enhanced learning (in breadth and depth) • More enduring learning • Transfer of learning to new situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced transfer of learning • Brainstorming • Problem solving
<p>Personal development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception of self as service giver • Enhanced willingness to take risks • Openness to new people and experiences • Leadership, communication, and teamwork skills • Exposure to and acceptance of different society groups • Development of internal control • More empathy—less judging 	<p>Community connections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of community problems • Awareness of service organizations • Enhanced civic responsibility
<p>Cognitive skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deepened understanding of concepts 	<p>Life skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowing when to ask for help • Knowing when to offer help • Knowing how to find help • Finishing a job that is started • Following rules and directions • Promoting personal safety • Self-evaluating • Deferring gratification • Communicating clearly and precisely

The students discuss the project goals. They understand the goals well enough to be able to describe them to the community partner. They do appropriate project tasks identified by the community partner or themselves and communicate professionally with the community partner. The students learn how to assume different roles as they participate in the various projects suggested in this book. Students who are working in a community soup kitchen, for instance, learn to be cooks, servers, food buyers, or menu planners. Students who work in a sports equipment “lending locker” act as clerks, advertising specialists, or inventory managers. Students maintain personal awareness of the curricular goals and their progress toward reaching those goals. The students and the teacher use a variety of assessment tools, discussed in the next chapter, to verify that appropriate content learning is taking place.