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SERVICE-LEARNING IN CALIFORNIA:
A PROFILE OF THE CALSERVE SERVICE-LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS (1997-2000)
Executive Summary

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BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

Responding to the National and Community Service Act of 1990, the California Department of Education developed the CalServe Initiative to support K-12 service-learning partnerships that would enhance student academic achievement and civic responsibility, increase teacher effectiveness and satisfaction, heighten school district awareness of service-learning, and provide authentic service to the community.

In 1997, following the completion of a statewide study of service-learning conducted by RPP International, CalServe enlisted the Service-Learning Research & Development Center (SLRDC) at the University of California, Berkeley to assist with the development of the 1997-2000 local evaluation process. This process was designed to assist CalServe partnerships in the collection of participation and impact data for their local service-learning activities. The data collected were also to be used to develop a statewide profile of service-learning participation and impact across CalServe's funded partnerships. The profile report summarized here presents the findings from this three-year statewide evaluation effort.

During the 1997-2000 funding cycle, a total of 38 local school-based service-learning partnerships (34 each year) were funded to implement K-12 service-learning district wide. CalServe hoped that these grants would help achieve Superintendent Delaine Eastin's Year 2000 Goal of having 25% of California's school districts offer students community service or service-learning opportunities throughout their K-12 education, at least one at each grade span (K-5, 6-8, 9-12).

CalServe asked partnerships to conduct yearly evaluations to promote local self-reflection and program improvement, to provide information for the construction of a picture of service-learning in the state, and to establish accountability. The overall question addressed in the statewide evaluation profile of these partnerships was, "How is service-learning impacting students, teachers, schools and communities?" All partnerships were required to report on two types of student impacts—the growth of academic knowledge and skills and the development of civic responsibility. In addition, partnerships were asked to select one other area to address— impacts of service-learning activities on teachers, impacts on schools/districts, or impacts on communities.

In addition to the reports submitted by individual partnerships, SLRDC staff conducted intensive site visits of seven partnerships during the 1999/2000 academic year. During these visits, focus groups and individual interviews were conducted with participating students, teachers, administrators, service-learning coordinators.

Measurement of Student Academic Impacts. Since service-learning can be used at any grade in any subject matter area, flexible assessment methods were needed to assess academic outcomes. Moreover, both teacher and student perspectives on student learning were desired. Consequently, local partnerships were asked to report and discuss academic impact data for classrooms using at least three different assessment strategies. They were asked: (1) to collect student self-assessments of their content learning using an approach called a "KWL" (what I Know; what I Want to know; what I have Learned); (2) to use teacher-generated assessments of targeted content learning ("Anchor Tasks"); and (3) to collect student scores on California's standardized achievement test (the STAR). Partnerships were also encouraged to include other measures of academic success that might speak to the effects of service-learning on student learning. To make it practical for partnerships to obtain this richer description of the academic impacts of service-learning, they were encouraged to restrict their evaluation efforts to just a sample of classrooms within their partnerships.

Measurement of Civic Responsibility. To assess the impact of service-learning on students' civic development, the SLRDC developed and distributed a Civic Responsibility Survey (CRS) during Years 1 and 2. Three grade-appropriate forms of this pre-test/post-test survey were sent to all local evaluation teams as a possible measurement instrument. Those partnerships that chose to use the CRS were offered the services of SLRDC in the processing of data collected using this survey during 1997/98 and 1998/99. To try to understand findings of the surveys from the first two years and to pursue questions about how various service-learning activities might lead to different civic attitudes among students, a new survey was developed by SLRDC and administered by seven of the 34 CalServe partnerships in Year 3 (1999/2000). These seven partnerships also cooperated in more detailed documentation of the service activities in sample classrooms and provided access to teachers and students for detailed interviews about civic attitudes, knowledge, and skills as well as about other aspects of service-learning implementation.

Other Measurement Procedures. While all local CalServe partnerships were requested to gather information on students' academic and civic development using the suggested methods, they were free to develop their own methods for studying their third category of impact (i.e., impacts on participating teachers, on schools and districts, or on the community).

The following pages provide a summary of the study's findings regarding implementation, impacts, and sustainability of service-learning. Implications for practice, research, and evaluation are also discussed.

IMPLEMENTATION OF SERVICE-LEARNING

Although individual partnerships varied widely in the number and kinds of students engaged in service-learning, across all the partnerships it can be said that service-learning activities were implemented with:

- more than 86,000 students at all three grade-spans (amounting to as many as 1/4 of the total number of students in participating districts).
- students representing all of California's major ethnic groups.
- students just beginning to learn English ("English Learners") as well as those fluent in the language.
- students from low income and low achieving schools as well as those from more middle class and advantaged backgrounds.

From an analysis of the background of a sample of teachers participating in CalServe partnerships, it appears that a majority of them were fairly new to service-learning, having tried this teaching methodology in their classrooms for two or fewer years. Topics that teachers chose for service-learning varied but most often centered on core subject matter areas (e.g., English, Science, History, etc.). The time students spent providing service tended to involve a total of 10 or fewer hours. (This average does not include time spent beforehand preparing for service or time afterward reflecting on service.) Efforts most frequently involved educational, environmental, or human service projects at public school sites or locations near school sites.

Goals articulated by partnerships in their reports were:

- stated very generally, making it difficult for partnerships to map their own progress.
- focused principally on the immediate tasks of enlisting the participation of the primary stake-holders in the partnership and on having a successful impact on students.
- less concerned with long-term efforts such as sustainability, coordination with other school initiatives, or with influencing district policies.
- connected partially with the developmental status of the partnership (such as focusing on community needs and training of constituents in the early years of the partnership, working on tighter curriculum integration after a few years of operation, and teacher recruitment when the emphasis shifted to sustainability).
- not necessarily related to the goals that individual teachers adopted for their service-learning activities.

IMPACTS OF SERVICE-LEARNING

Student Academic Impacts. Partnerships experienced difficulties in measuring the academic impacts of service-learning. Though a great deal of information was obtained through partnership reports and site interviews about the diversity of academic goals in local service-learning activities, many teachers had difficulty clearly specifying their primary academic goals or designing tasks suited to their stated academic goals. Consequently, data collected by local partnerships using the various measurement approaches were insufficient to allow overall generalizations to be made about the extent of academic learning achieved by students while engaged in service-learning activities. However, the reviewed data, especially from the intensive study interviews, provided clues that should be pursued in subsequent research focused on program features related to high levels of academic learning.

Characteristics of implementation that appear to be important for facilitating academic outcomes include the following:

- *Clarity of Academic Goals:* the extent to which a teacher has thought through the subject matter concepts to be taught via service-learning and explicitly communicates these goals to students
- *Connection between Goals and Activities:* the match between the type of targeted concepts or skills and the *nature* of the service-learning activities (e.g. if problem-solving skills are targeted, the degree to which students engage in problem solving activities)
- *Reasonable Scope:* the likelihood that the learning goals can be substantially addressed within the amount of time devoted to the service-learning activities
- *Support by Focused Reflection:* the degree to which reflection activities relate directly to the concepts to be taught.

Student Civic Impacts. Analyses of the 1997/98 and 1998/99 Civic Responsibility Survey data by SLRDC indicated that students' sense of civic responsibility increased in some classrooms where service-learning was used. However, increases did not occur uniformly and were of different magnitudes in various classrooms. As with academic impacts, a review of the survey results and the interview findings suggests that there are no simple relationships between students' participation in service-learning activities and civic outcomes. Rather the data suggest that there were:

- substantial differences in teachers' goals regarding civic responsibility and citizenship outcomes.
- disparities among classrooms in whether, how much, and in what way students' civic attitudes were changed.
- linkages between student attitudes about service and students' personal interests and previous service experiences.
- differences in students' thinking about good citizenship (for example, individual differences among students in their citing of moral, social or political behaviors when defining civic responsibility).

Teacher Impacts. Data collected from participating teachers suggested that they were motivated to use service-learning for a variety of reasons and that they learned about its possibilities from many different sources. Most often, however, teachers reported that they used this pedagogical strategy to motivate students to enjoy school and to help them acquire important civic, social, and personal skills. Teachers' service-learning goals were varied, and the nature of the particular goals selected seems to have had a profound effect on implementation strategies.

Teachers were asked how they benefited personally from using service-learning. Their responses focused on

contributions such as the acquisition of better teaching management skills, increased subject-matter knowledge, enhanced relationships with students, and more opportunities to collaborate with other teachers and members of the community. The challenges most frequently cited by teachers involved logistical difficulties in arranging service activities, a need for more planning time, and the need for more support from administrators and other teachers. Many of these difficulties might be ameliorated with better and more continuous professional development.

District and Community Impacts. Only a few partnerships explicitly addressed either district or community impacts during Year 1 (1997/98) or Year 2 (1998/99). Those that did evaluate school and district impacts tended to do so informally and frequently concluded that:

- understanding of service-learning had increased among school and district administrators.

- strategies had been identified to advance service-learning at the school and district levels.

Interviews conducted by SLRDC staff with administrators and coordinators during 1999/2000 also indicated other positive benefits that local administrators and staff believed were attributable to service-learning activities being carried out in their schools—that involvement by parents and community members had increased, that school climate had improved, and that feelings of "community" within the school had grown.

Community outcomes reported by partnerships included the following:

- The community was involved in various ways (ranging from simply receiving student volunteers to partnering with teachers to develop curricula and assessments).

- Services performed by students met a legitimate need in the community.

- Service-learning assisted the work of community agency partners, generating positive feelings toward participation in the partnership.

- Service-learning activities positively affected attitudes toward youth in the community.

SUSTAINABILITY OF SERVICE-LEARNING

The primary goals of the CalServe Initiative are not only to promote but also to sustain and institutionalize service-learning in California's K-12 schools. Examination of the 1997-2000 local partnership evaluation reports and the site visit interview data led to the identification of key factors that were related either to advancement or to lack of progress in the sustainability efforts of local service-learning partnerships:

- Many partnerships tended to focus the bulk of their attention on expanding the number of participating teachers and schools rather than on building the quality of their service-learning efforts.

- Few partnerships established clear and comprehensive long-term visions of their partnerships.

- Partnerships focused predominately on immediate issues and were often not clear about the meaning of

sustainability or the long-term implications of practices such as depending on temporary funding for key staff.

- Personnel turnover hindered many partnerships' ability to sustain service-learning activities.

- Sustainability was promoted by strategies such as tying service-learning to other educational reform efforts in the district or developing an issue focus that promoted long-term collaborations with community partners.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This three-year study of service-learning in California has provided important insights into ways partnerships can improve the practice and evaluation of service-learning and has identified questions about key components of service-learning that future research needs to clarify.

Implications for Ensuring High-Quality Practice. In reviewing student outcomes of service-learning reported by partnerships, it became clear that most teachers would have profited from more assistance in selecting, evaluating, and reflecting on students' attainment of academic and civic impact goals and from time dedicated to planning for better achievement of those goals. To ensure that real community needs are met, teachers as well as representatives of the community need to be involved in discussions about competing priorities in the selection and implementation of service activities.

RECOMMENDATION: _Urge partnerships to build in sufficient time and ongoing support for teachers and other participants to develop clear goals for academic and civic knowledge and skills to be gained through service-learning and ways of evaluating and continuously improving these outcomes._

RECOMMENDATION: _Acknowledge the developmental nature of quality implementation by urging partnerships to devote ongoing resources to two types of professional development—individualized assistance and feedback, and group discussions that promote intellectual stimulation and the feeling of camaraderie and participation in a larger worthwhile effort._

RECOMMENDATION: _Use the expertise of experienced teachers who use service-learning to help train new teachers._

RECOMMENDATION: _Be mindful of the extra work required for teachers to implement service-learning and carefully consider each additional requirement presented to participants, especially in relation to evaluation activities and coordination activities with community partners._

Implications for Sustainability and Institutionalization. Partnerships need to visualize what sustainability for service-learning might look like in their districts. Partnerships need assistance in clarifying and articulating particular types of school and district or community outcomes that fit in with their long-term goals and in working out reasonable ways of confirming these school/district and community impacts. In addition, partnerships need to place sufficient emphasis on improving the quality of all implemented activities and take steps to minimize personnel turnover. Among the

recommendations offered to enhance service-learning partnerships' sustainability are the following:

RECOMMENDATION: *Help partnerships conceptualize a clear and comprehensive vision by supplying examples of successful district-wide service-learning initiatives.*

RECOMMENDATION: *Provide CalServe grants to fund the development of formal district-wide strategic plans for sustaining and institutionalizing service-learning.*

RECOMMENDATION: *As part of the granting process, require school districts to provide a financial match to support key coordinating positions.*

Implications for Local Evaluation. The 1997-2000 local evaluation process was structured to accomplish multiple goals—evaluation of program implementation and improvement, sustainability, impacts on all participants, and best teaching practices. The data collected during the SLRDC study suggest that one process and methodology cannot successfully accomplish all of these goals. Given the limited resources available and the expertise required for effective evaluation of the various aspects of service-learning, choices need to be made about the primary goals and most suitable methodology for each particular evaluation effort. In addition to sharpening the focus of evaluation, a number of procedural and strategic steps might improve the effectiveness of the local evaluation process and facilitate the statewide evaluation of service-learning programs.

RECOMMENDATION: *Separate the local and state evaluation processes by having local partnerships focus their evaluation primarily on studying implementation and program effectiveness issues and by having the state be responsible for studies of impacts on various participants.*

RECOMMENDATION: *Tie the local evaluation process more firmly to partnerships' efforts to achieve their own goals and benchmarks, not to their success in satisfying criteria imposed from outside the partnership. Ensure that local ownership of the evaluation is maintained when state-led evaluation guidance is provided.*

RECOMMENDATION: *Provide incentives to encourage partnerships to conduct longitudinal evaluations of program implementation and improvement.*

RECOMMENDATION: *Explore ways of maximizing the use of evaluation funds (e.g., establishing regional centers for training and technical assistance in service-learning evaluation, networking evaluators and local evaluation teams for collegial feedback and problem-solving, etc.).*

RECOMMENDATION: *Use a variety of contexts and types of interactions (such as focus groups, e-mail exchanges, and evaluation reports) to collect feedback and ideas from local evaluation teams for improving the evaluation process.*

Implications for Research on Impacts and Best Practices. This study suggests that more research is needed on the implementation of service-learning as it relates to student development in the areas of civic responsibility and academic learning. In order to carry out such investigations, different targeted aspects of civic responsibility and citizenship need to be clearly differentiated. Similarly, different types of academic learning objectives need to be clearly conceptualized and operationally defined if their achievement is to be evaluated and linked to instructional practices.

In addition to clarifying definitions and being more specific about civic and academic goals, special attention needs to be paid to evaluation issues, such as the match between goals articulated for particular service-learning activities and the measures used to assess impact. More research is needed to make the connections clearer between service-learning curricula and the development of knowledge and skills in various subject matter areas. More work also needs to be done to increase understanding of ways particular service-learning experiences interact with student characteristics such as previous service-learning experience, existing attitudes and values, and dominant intellectual interests.

In order to build better theories of the links between service-learning teaching practices and student outcomes, the field currently might be better informed by well-executed case studies carried out in partnership with teachers and focused on particular service-learning goals and practices, as opposed to experimental studies that employ standardized tests of general subject areas to compare large heterogeneous collections of classrooms being taught with or without service-learning.

RECOMMENDATION: *Clarify the range of definitions of civic and academic outcomes for service-learning and develop measures that match the types of learning emphasized.*

RECOMMENDATION: *Use detailed case studies as well as existing theory and research to develop hypotheses about key civic and academic learning domains impacted by service-learning, about student behaviors that indicate growth in these domains, and about implementation practices frequently associated with positive outcomes of these various types.*

RECOMMENDATION: *Look for relationships between growth in civic and academic areas during service-learning and student characteristics such as existing attitudes, values, interests, and previous service-learning experience.*

Implications for Research on Sustaining and Institutionalizing Service-Learning. Findings from this study pertinent to the sustainability of service-learning suggest that more information is needed on basic issues such as strategic planning, staffing approaches, and the contextualization of such strategies to particular districts and partnerships.

RECOMMENDATION: *Use the current school reform literature and new research to investigate productive approaches for strategic planning and visioning, for maintaining stability of staff and resources, for promoting program quality, and for creating collaborations with other district programs and community partners.*

RECOMMENDATION: *Investigate distinctions in the development and sustainability of partnerships of different types over time.*