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Service Learning: Developing a Curriculum for Caring

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tional items, publicity, special events and personal contacts, and advertising), school district, Chamber of Commerce, ministerial association, small business, industry, Parents for Public Schools, PTA, retired citizens, banking and finance institutions, city government, public housing, apartment owners, MSU and Mississippi extension service, fine arts, telephone bank, transportation, and Oktibbeha County Hospital. Most of these committees included leaders and members from other support organizations.

The bond issue passage was especially significant because there was vocal opposition. A city alderman and two leaders of minority organizations publicly stated their opposition to the bond. They stated various reasons and carried many voters with them. However, because of proactive measures taken by the committees prior to and after these denouncements, the positive messages outweighed the negatives.

Awards

School improvement is evidenced in the many awards and honors earned by the district over the past several years. In 1994–1995:
- Sudduth Kindergarten was presented with the U.S. Department of Education Blue Ribbon School of Excellence Award;
- Overstreet Elementary was named one of the "51 Best in the Nation" by *Redbook* magazine;
- Ward Elementary was presented with the Toshiba/National Science Teachers Award for a project completed by students;
- both Starkville Teachers of the Year and Parent of the Year were winners in the Third Congressional District;

- one district teacher received a Presidential Award for teaching science;
- Starkville High had four National Merit finalists, and seniors earned more than $640,000 in college and university scholarships;
- the high school band earned its thirty-ninth consecutive year of superior ratings during state competitions; and
- two athletic teams earned state championships, and several others earned state ranking.

Many of these accomplishments were possible because of direct involvement of parents and other interested publics. These honors show what a positive impact one district can make on a national level when groups work together.

Summary and Keys to Success

The programs of the Starkville School District include key publics, both internally and externally. These interdependent groups of people include parents, school staff, students, business community, community groups, local news media and board of education members.[5]

"No public relations program can make a bad school look good for very long."[6] One necessity to have truly effective public relations, or school–community relations as many are now terming it, is that the district must have quality programs. The Starkville School District has many as evidenced by the previously mentioned awards. Obviously, no school system is perfect or without problems, but there are too many people in our communities who are exposed to a narrow perspective of what schools are doing.

Service Learning: Developing a Curriculum for Caring

Sally R. Beisser

This article defines service learning and provides summary data on a federal grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service to implement service learning in the classroom. The author identifies and describes four categories of successful service projects and provides examples of integrating the curriculum content to identify and meet community and school-based needs. She then suggests instructional strategies and follow-up resources for professional use.

Service learning is more than a good deed. It begins with the identification of a problem or need within the community or school setting, then students, as problem solvers, together with their teacher make decisions about areas of concern in the real world in which they live and learn. They generate ways to collaborate and to implement a specific service project through which they can make a difference in the lives of others.

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Service learning challenges teachers to integrate their regular classroom curriculum content as they design activities that embrace the community as a learning laboratory. They use hands-on learning, problem solving and application of academic knowledge, which we know significantly increase student achievement.[1] Basic academic skills may include expressing ideas or reading about areas of concern in their community or school; calculating costs of providing support through project ideas; making observations, asking questions, conducting interviews or phone calls, thinking critically, using judgment, addressing issues, conducting research, sharing decision making, acting responsibly and reflecting insightfully on their

intentions and actions. Is this not "authentic learning?"

U.S. Secretary of Education Richard E. Riley stated that service learning and school reform are natural allies, in that all children learn more and provide greater service to society if we challenge them more and hold high expectations with higher learning standards in enriched course content, applying subject matter in real-life settings.[2] Students develop a sense of caring for others, which builds character and develops citizenship.

Bridging the Gap

Iowa State University, University of Iowa and University of Northern Iowa are united in a collaborative effort called "Bridging the Gap—The Iowa Service Learning Partnership." In this program, pre-service teachers and their cooperating classroom teachers engage in service learning activities during the student-teaching semester. Proposals are submitted to a site coordinator at each university. Training is provided at each site to optimize teachers' service learning experience. University students are taught about service learning during social studies methods course preparation. Project funding is provided for professional planning and project expenditures by the Corporation for National and Community Service. Survey data are collected from both the pre-service teacher and classroom teacher after they have completed their projects. The pre-service teachers assemble at the close of the semester for debriefing and for celebrating their service learning projects. At the close of the initial grant period, over thirty-six Iowa school districts had been involved in either training or service projects. Even

after the pre-service teachers leave the classroom, over half of the cooperating teachers continue service learning projects,[3] and most of the university students claim that they will continue service learning in their own classrooms. Collaborative service learning curriculum was written at all three universities.

What Makes a Successful Project?

To begin a service project, three tasks are essential. First, decide on a local problem, need or issue. Next, choose and design a service project. Then, develop an action plan to integrate the service project with classroom curriculum goals and objectives. Three components for planning a successful service learning project are[4]

• *Preparation.* Identify a specific need. Have students conduct a neighborhood survey, arrange a classroom visit from a local service agency, read the newspapers and cut out articles on community concerns, look up phone numbers and addresses of social or environmental agencies, talk to senior citizens or homeless people about their needs and issues. Help the class focus on a specific area of community need. To prepare the learners have them engage in a provocative group discussion, read about the concern or issues, explore learning or interest centers or interact with a guest speaker. Build group consensus before initiating action.

• *Action.* Discuss and implement plans for action. Build learning activities integrating service with academics. This is not an added curriculum chore; it is integrating the curriculum with active citizenship experiences. In social studies, discuss the role of civic responsibility, use local maps and investigate local history, review

current events and issues. In language arts, encourage writing and communication skills by conducting surveys, researching a topic or reporting findings. In math, keep expense records or graph progress; calculate time and distance for travel to the project site. In science, conduct experiments on water quality or environmental balance if the focus is environmental. Tree and flower plantings are frequent project choices.

Resources and time are necessary to carry out a project whether it lasts a month or the entire year. Learn to appropriate classroom and local resources.Invite community collaboration. Consider outside help or fund raising. Many businesses and organizations willingly assist students' project development through donations and personal support.

• *Reflection.* Reflection, which helps students ask questions of themselves, often is overlooked. Intuitive thoughts expressed in large or small discussion groups as well as through creative writing may be prompted by asking students: What have you learned about yourselves? What have you learned about others? How is the project going? What would you change? What problems have you faced? How did you address them? What bigger social, environmental or societal issues are represented with this project? What and how could you share what you've learned?

Successful Service Projects

Pre-service and cooperating teachers participating in the Iowa State University program have been involved in four categories of service projects: intergenerational, environmental, people-in-poverty and school-as-community.

Intergenerational
• Third graders provided a Thanksgiving meal for senior citizens. They estimated, cooked and served a complete meal. They also shared projects on thankfulness and decorated the retirement center.
• Students corresponded with Elder-Pals in many different care-center facilities. They decorated the facilities with seasonal and holiday themes, read stories aloud and shared school projects with the residents.
• Students visited a senior center regularly, sharing school projects and artwork and conducting oral history interviews with the residents, using world and state maps.

Environmental
• Students created an Environmental Walkway near their school playground by planting flowers, shrubs and bulbs to attract butterflies. They balanced color, height, hardiness and blooming duration of the species.
• Students developed an outdoor classroom by planting seeds, perennials and shrubs to replicate a prairie for a study on Iowa history. They built and erected song bird and owl houses.
• In coordination with the Conservation Commission, sixth graders germinated wildflowers for transplant in an Iowa state park after a unit on plants, trees and the environment.
• First graders learned about birds, read and shared bird books with Head Start students and built bird houses for a community shelter after a bird unit.

People in Poverty
- Following a unit on needs and wants, first graders supplied the MICA (Mid-Iowa Community Action) food pantry with non-perishable foods and paper supplies.
- To help fill a community pantry, fourth graders organized a food and personal-item drive through fund-raising, collecting, organizing and writing for donations from businesses.
- Students collected winter coats, hats and mittens for impoverished and immigrant children in Iowa schools who were not going out for recess because they did not have proper clothing for the cold weather.

School as Community
- Students purchased a school pencil vending machine with a loan from a local bank. They use the revenue to repay the loan and to continue other class service projects.
- Elementary students worked with a Head Start program in the community to read stories and celebrate holidays. They made visits and provided picture books.
- Students provided holiday gifts for at-risk families in a metropolitan area school. They worked with the school counselor and did not know the identity of the families.
- As a whole-school effort, students turned off their television sets in conjunction with National Turn Off the TV Week. They shared a presentation with the local school board.
- Students raffled a class quilt during the Family Fun Night to purchase quality children's books and periodicals for the school library.
- Students formed "factories" to manufacture toys, games and amusements for children who are patients in the pediatric ward of a local hospital.

Suggested Resources

Cairn, R.W. and T. Coble. *Learning by Giving* (curriculum guide). St. Paul, Minn.: National Youth Leadership Council, 1993. The National Youth Leadership Council is a national clearinghouse for grade K–12 service-learning schooling. Contact NYLC at 1910 West Country Road B, St. Paul, MN 55113, or telephone (612) 631-3672.

"The Courage, the Care, the Strength to Serve." *Maryland Student Service Alliance Curriculum Guides*. Baltimore, Md.: Maryland Student Service Alliance, 1992. Well-designed curriculum guides for elementary, middle school and high school, plus a promotional video, are available by writing to the Maryland Student Service Alliance, 200 West Baltimore Street, Baltimore, MD 21201.

Other helpful redsources are

Lewis, B.A. *The Kid's Guide to Social Action*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Free Spirit Publishing, 1991.

Novelli, Joan and Beth Chayet. *The Kids Care Book: 50 Class Projects that Help Others*. New York: Scolastic Professional Books, 1991.

Service learning projects are building communities of concern in classrooms. Children are making a commitment through active citizenship. Teachers are using the plethora of local resources to address social, political and environmental issues and concern for the welfare of others. Schools are working in partnership with families and other community

members to develop and implement character education and citizenship education programs.[5] The world is left a better place.

To give of one's self; to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition...to know that even one life has breathed easier because you have lived — that is to have succeeded.
Ralph Waldo Emerson Δ

References
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3. "Year-End Progress Report." *Learn and Serve America: Higher Education*. Washington, D.C.: Corporation for National Service, February 1, 1995 to July 31, 1995.
4. Wade, Rahima. "Community Service Learning." *Social Studies and the Young Child*, January/February 1994. (Her new book on service learning will be available from State University of New York Press in 1996.)
5. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. "ASCD Takes Two Positions." *Education Update*, 37(4), May 1995.

Enhancing School Public Relations Through Community Partnerships
(Continued from page 14.)

The overall goals of all these groups working with the Starkville School District are to encourage various publics to view the entire picture before making a judgment, to encourage all publics to provide feedback on ways to improve the schools and to make a difference by being involved with the schools. When many people from different groups work together, local citizens feel ownership of the schools, and the district continues to improve. Excellent schools positively impact tourism, retirement relocation, economic development and all other aspects of the community. The quality of life of all area citizens can be improved when community partnerships are planned, implemented and continued.   Δ

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1. Martinson, David. "School Public Relations Do It Right or Don't Do It At All!" *The Journal of Educational Relations*, 16(3), July 1995: 8–9.
2. Cutlip, Scott, Allen Center and Glen Broom. *Effective Public Relations* (7th ed.). Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1994.
3. Yantis, John. "Community Relations Start with the Internal School Climate." *The Journal of Educational Relations*, 16(3) July 1995: 2–6.
4. Cutlip, Center and Broom: 513.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Kindred, Leslie, Don Bagin and Donald Gallagher. *The School and Community Relations* (3rd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, N.J. Prentice-Hall, 1984: 3.