

Summer 1996

Community Service throughout a School System

Anne Bishop

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/slceslgen>



Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), and the [Service Learning Commons](#)

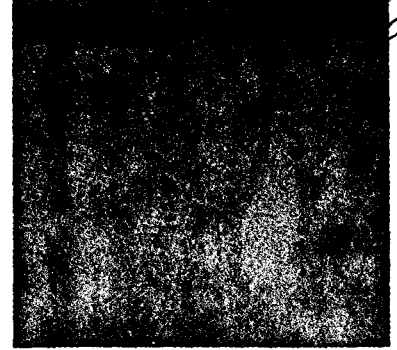
Please take our feedback survey at: https://unomaha.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8cchtFmpDyGfBLE

Recommended Citation

Bishop, Anne, "Community Service throughout a School System" (1996). *Service Learning, General*. 6.
<https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/slceslgen/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Service Learning at DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Service Learning, General by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu.

NSLC
c/o ETR Associates
4 Carbonero Way
Scotts Valley, CA 95066



21370

Community Service throughout a School System

Anne Bishop • Hoover City Schools • Hoover, Alabama

Teachers crave moments when student interest is high, questions flow freely, and learning is vivid enough to be retained. One such moment occurred when an elementary student in an environmental service project with wetlands volunteers said, "I learned that there are different types of wetlands and ours is a freshwater wetland that we are helping to stay fresh." These moments happen more often when students actively engage in experiences that involve helping others than during lecture, pencil and paper exercises, or assigned reading. Combined, service and learning become uniquely powerful (Kendall 1990). Facts learned in the classroom become a springboard for a service project. The need for additional learning arises when planning the project. In the real-life learning environment, the project stimulates curiosity, which increases the number of teachable moments in the classroom. Practitioners widely accept research conclusions that retention rates soar to 75-90 percent when instruction involves practice by doing, teaching others, and immediate use of learning—and service learning incorporates all these activities.

A synthesis of thoughtfully organized service experiences through which students learn the facts, skills, and attitudes of the curriculum, service learning meets

actual community needs and broadens the site of learning beyond the school. Young people think, talk, and write about what they do and see during the service activity. They use newly acquired academic skills and knowledge in real-life situations and develop a sense of caring for others. Service adds zest to learning, leads to teachable moments during and after school hours, and offers promise of preparing students for vocations after school years end.

In the Curriculum

Service linked to teaching goals and objectives already in the planned curriculum, properly called service learning, takes place when teachers design instruction around a service project. With the effectiveness of service learning firmly established by research, integration of service into instruction received a huge boost from the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993, which spelled out U.S. public policy about learning that improves the quality of life in the community and involves more youth in healthy behavior. One section of it, the Learn and Serve America program, funds grants to encourage the practice of service learning. In Alabama, 26 school systems receive this funding. Hoover City Schools uses these funds to provide a model program for at-risk students, professional development on service learning, and a published

journal of service learning projects throughout the 11 schools of the district (Bishop 1995).

During the School Year

The number of goals and objectives planned for students in the United States exceeds that of any other leading country, so it is not surprising that requests to add another worthy item to full instructional schedules turns off teachers. A frequent teacher response is, "I am so busy, I can't take on anything else." But service learning is part of a delivery system, an instructional methodology—service learning teaches what you need to teach more powerfully. It is not an additional subject. Hoover City Schools' emphasis on service learning begins with the premise that teachers in all grade levels and subject areas can use the instructional strategy of service learning in accomplishing some goals and objectives.

Four simple steps lead a teacher, or team of teachers, to successful and strategic use of service learning: planning, participating, reflecting, and celebrating. A teacher plans service learning by looking over curriculum goals and noting topics that he or she can relate to a service project. The project should enable students to do real tasks, practice in context, and observe others doing the work they must learn to do. Whether the integration of service

Students serve
by visiting the
elderly.

and curriculum begins with curricular objectives and moves to service projects, or proceeds from an available service project to curricular links, both curriculum and service elements are imperative.

Participating in service activities requires different types of social interaction and teaches different skills. Direct service involves immediate contact with people being served, such as when tutoring students or visiting people who are elderly, and it teaches students to focus on others' needs and to get along with people who are different from themselves. Indirect service, often environmental projects or fund-raisers, teaches students to work on a team, play different roles, organize others to accomplish a job, and value others' contributions to solving problems. Advocacy service that requires speaking, lobbying, or performing to benefit a cause or a group encourages students to persevere, to work with adults, and to learn appreciation for the political process.

Reflecting on the service experience—probably the most important of these steps—involves observation, formulation of questions, and synthesis of learning from the service experience with known information to make new meaning. As with much good teaching, the cognitive process can be set in motion when the teacher asks carefully selected questions like:

- What was the best or worst thing about your service project?
- Describe the people you served.
- What did we do to prepare for this service?
- What are some tips you would give other students preparing for this type of service?
- What did the body language of the people we served show you?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- How did you feel when we first got there? When we left?
- If you had been one of the people you served, what would you think about yourself?
- What problems did this experience reveal?
- How could society do a better job with these problems?
- What occurred to you during the service that you would like to learn more about?

Celebrating learning and service creates an essential climate of respect and value for service learning, motivates learners to continue service, and recruits new volunteers. About the importance of appreciation, a middle school student in a service learning project said, "A compliment makes our day. When the people that we help smile and tell us that we did a great job, we see that we did." A fifth grader explained, "Some people think getting money is better than getting a compliment, but to me getting a compliment is better than getting money. After we work, we like to celebrate for all the hard work we've done." Celebrations consisting of simple snacks and a party time seem simple to arrange, but they also require an element of sincere, task-specific recognition, such as praise from the principal. Recognition also



comes from the communication of changed attitudes. A custodian who observed a group of students cleaning a new school for occupancy said that he had "never seen a group of kids work so hard." Hoover City Schools frequently give such recognition over closed-circuit television programs operated by students. Although the broadcast does not go beyond the building, it goes where it matters most—to peer recognition.

During the Summer

Most of Hoover City Schools' Learn and Serve Alabama funds provide a summer program of structured community service activities for youth in grades 5–12 who live in six apartment complexes that are targeted for their higher number of students in Chapter I remedial programs and on free or reduced lunches. The summer programs allow older students to mentor younger students entering middle and high school for enhancing the transition to the next grade. Students become involved in positive



Students learn about people who are different from themselves.

U.S. young people already perform some type of service—yet schools seldom capture the educational significance of this research finding (Briscoe 1995). In Hoover City Schools, a community service award program recognizes students at school for

school and community relationships, and bonding to wholesome norms through service learning becomes a risk-reduction factor for unhealthy behavior. As a tenth grader confessed, “I got into this service to get away from being in the house all day long this summer. But we painted fences, cleaned dog cages, picked up trash, cleaned windows, read with little kids, and a lot more. I know I want to do a lot more of this work in the community.”

The summer program provides bus transportation on weekdays for two months, parent involvement, adult facilitation, and relationships with community partners, as well as a heavy infusion of learning opportunities and an emphasis on learning outcomes. Students participate in planned service activities that teach job functions and related facts about community agencies’ roles, reflect daily on what they learn, and celebrate the work they do.

Extracurricular Service

Although curriculum integration transforms community service into service learning, extracurricular community service frequently leads to new learning. Over 50 percent of

extracurricular service to the community. The power of the plan lies in valuing the good that students do outside school in front of their peers to support their personal development during the same years we focus on academic excellence. Extracurricular service activities reflect diversity in families and community memberships—service projects from churches of all faiths, individual efforts, memberships in a variety of youth organizations, and a wide assortment of interests and activities. The Student Community Service Award requires that students contribute service for which they do not receive pay or grade credit. Of course, service learning with class credit is not part of the award system.

In the Hoover City Schools, K-12 students contributed approximately 30,000 hours of extracurricular service to the community in the 1995-96 school year. Students in elementary school receive ribbons and recognition for extracurricular service to the community at the end of nine-week periods. Middle school students get a plaque for 60 hours of service within a calendar year. This year, more than 150 students at

Hoover High School received school letters for doing 80 hours of service each. Many of these students added bars to their letters for repeating the 80-hour requirement, for a school total of 15,000 hours of service to the community. The high school principal credits community service with fostering character traits such as responsibility, perseverance, time management, initiative, self-reliance, and resourcefulness. Students demonstrate these qualities, contribute to establishing helping behavior as a norm for other teens, and help many people in diverse ways.

The Impact of Service

Service activities and experiences benefit students beyond the years of formal education by developing skills and knowledge that workers in the 21st century will increasingly need. Learning from service also can validate the need for higher education. A teen involved in cleaning the park and recreation center announced, “I have decided that I want to get a college education because now I know I don’t want to spend my life washing windows.”

Like other school systems, Hoover City Schools is scurrying to prepare the next generation for work beyond the K-12 curriculum in the information-age economy. A look at the proliferating technology plans in school systems confirms educators’ desires to prepare tomorrow’s workers and their underlying assumption that success in the economy of the 21st century will require a mind trained for the virtual corridors of the information superhighway—but that is not the whole story.

While information-age technologies are replacing humans in every industry, some business leaders worry that high-tech jobs will not be

numerous enough to employ the next generation; most of us will use technology but not create it. Jeremy Rifkin (1996), president of the Foundation on Economic Trends in Washington, D.C., describes a fundamental transformation in the nature of work that is being brought on by new technologies. Within 10 years, less than 12 percent of the U.S. work force will be working on a factory floor; by 2020, less than 2 percent of the world's work force will work in factories. Though many have assumed that displaced factory workers will find new jobs in the large service sector, even the service sector is beginning to automate, eliminating white collar workers from banking, insurance, wholesale, and retail industries. Highly skilled professional work teams using state-of-the-art technologies are replacing the traditional corporate pyramid, and even the government is retreating from its traditional role of employer.

On the other hand, 1.4 million nonprofit organizations in the United States have combined assets of more than \$500 billion. These nonprofit groups now employ 10.5 percent of the nation's workers. The civil sector of our economy, made up of social services, health care, education, research, the arts, religion, and advocacy, joins the market and

government sectors in being the employers of the future (Rifkin 1996). The market and government sectors helped to shape U.S. greatness, but the civil sector, probably the oldest and least acknowledged, shaped our culture. The nonprofit civil sector, with its need for interpersonal skills, might be the best hope for absorbing millions of workers displaced by corporate and government restructuring. Service to and with other people might be as important in career preparation as training in emerging technologies.

Service learning programs, gaining momentum in U.S. schools, reflect new interest in the social capital created by the civil sector and a shift in the fundamental mission of U.S. education. Service becomes a legitimate curricular strategy to teach children the value of service and the importance of creating social capital in their own communities. A 14-year-old loner described service learning projects with the Humane Society and Wildlife Rescue in this way: "We began to use teamwork when there were difficulties. We always worked it out and became a team. We all went home happy." Such testimonies show why many view service learning as a learning tool to prepare the next generation for its responsibilities.

To the parents, teachers, and

communities concerned about the alienation and aimlessness of the nation's young people, service learning offers hope for providing young people the opportunity for deep participation in the community. Proponents of service learning are counting on ambitious results—that it can develop personal responsibility and accountability; foster self-esteem and leadership; help creativity, initiative, and empathy to grow and flourish; reduce incidence of depression, drug and alcohol abuse, suicide, and violent crime; give a youngster a sense of place and belonging; and add meaning to life. After washing police cars, a group of Hoover City School teens was treated to a tour of the jail. One boy gave promise of realization of this hope when he reflected out loud, "I hope this is as close as I ever get to seeing the inside of a jail."

Service learning assumes that students are increasingly moving toward independence, possess many capabilities, can be trustworthy and responsible, learn well through experiential activities, and have contributed much of the work over recorded history in societies around the world. At Hoover City Schools, we believe that involvement in the community through service better prepares students for their adult lives.

Bishop, A., ed. 1995. *Hoover City Schools Service Learning Journal*. Hoover, Ala.: Hoover City Schools.

Briscoe, J. 1994. *How to establish a high school service learning program*. Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Kendall, J. 1990. *Combining service and learning: A resource book for community and public service*. Vol. 1. Raleigh, N.C.: National Society for Internships and Experimental Education.

Rifkin, J. 1996. Rethinking the mission of American education. *Education Week* 15(19): 44.

Anne Bishop is Supervisor of Community Relations at Hoover City Schools in Hoover, Alabama. Dr. Bishop is a member of the Epsilon Psi Chapter of Kappa Delta Pi.

KDP
member

Kappa Delta Pi Record 32(4): 126-129
© 1996 Kappa Delta Pi

