

1999

The Impact of Integrating a Structured Ethical Reflection Program into High School Service-Learning Experiences on Students' Socio-moral Development (Executive Summary: Final Report)

INS

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/slceprojectsummaries>

 Part of the [Service Learning Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

INS, "The Impact of Integrating a Structured Ethical Reflection Program into High School Service-Learning Experiences on Students' Socio-moral Development (Executive Summary: Final Report)" (1999). *Project Summaries*. 42.
<http://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/slceprojectsummaries/42>

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



Executive Summary

Final Report

The Impact of Integrating a Structured Ethical Reflection Program into High School Service-Learning Experiences on Students' Socio-moral Development

This evaluation reports the effects on students' socio-moral development of the implementation of a program that integrates training in ethical decision making skills and service-learning programs. Because the program blends the development of ethical reasoning with service learning experiences for students, it represents a new direction for both service-learning and moral/ethical/character education.

There were two general goals for this project. The first goal was to advance students' ability to make ethically defensible decisions (ethical fitness) using the ethical decision making framework of the Building Decision Skills (BDS) curriculum of the Institute for Global Ethics. The second goal was to demonstrate that there was a "value added" effect on students' moral/social development as a result of integrating ethical decision making activities into service-learning programs.

A quasi-experimental non-equivalent pre and posttest with control group research design was used. The research questions of the study required that students be assessed on the dependent variables before and after experiencing one of three conditions: service-learning with an ethical reasoning component (SLE), service learning without an ethical reasoning component (SLO), and no service-learning or control (CON).

This research was guided by five primary research questions. The foci for the evaluation were developed following an evaluation of the BDS curriculum, a review of the research on service-learning, and discussions with Insitiute for Global Ethics educational staff. The research questions focused on (1) differences between the three groups of students in ethical orientation used in resolving service learning scenarios/dilemmas; (2) differences between the three groups of students in sense of responsibility for the welfare of others within their school and society at large; (3) differences between the three groups of students in sense of self-esteem in social settings; (4) differences between the three groups of students in preference for/rankings of basic social values; and (5) differences between the three groups of students in anticipated future participation in community activities.

Three different school districts served as locations for the evaluation. These locations were East Coast (mid-sized city), West Coast (large inner city community), and midwest (large affluent suburban community). In two of the settings, East Coast and West Coast, inadequate implementation of the Building Decision Skills curriculum and the low quality of the students'

service-learning experiences resulted in a level of program implementation that invalidated the data as a fair test of the effectiveness of the program. The results of the evaluation for the “fair test” implementation at the midwest site were as follows.

First, it was found that students that have experienced the Building Decision Skills (BDS) curriculum, when spontaneously resolving dilemmas/situations of an ethical nature, are more likely to

- interpret the situation as having an ethical dimension
- take personal responsibility for resolving the situation/dilemma
- analyze (frame) the nature of the situation from the perspective presented in the BDS curriculum—right vs. right conflict—when compared to students that have not experienced the BDS curriculum.

Second, both students that have experienced the Building Decision Skills curriculum within a service-learning context and students that have had a service learning experience without the BDS curriculum are more likely to develop a sense of responsibility to their school than students that have not experienced either the BDS curriculum or service-learning.

Third, students that have experienced the Building Decision Skills curriculum within a service learning context rank three values—honesty, community and responsibility—significantly higher on the posttest than control students that had neither service learning nor the BDS curriculum. Service learning students without the BDS curriculum did not rank these values higher than control students on the posttest. No statistically significant difference on the ranking of these values was found between service-learning plus ethics students and service learning only students. This finding suggests that a “value added” effect exists for including ethical reflection into service learning experiences, but only when service-learning plus ethics students are compared with control students.

Fourth, students that have experienced the Building Decision Skills curriculum within a service-learning context rank the value of wealth on the posttest lower than control students, and pleasure lower than students that had experienced service-learning only. Finally, students that have experienced the Building Decision Skills curriculum within a service-learning context rank responsibility higher than students that had experienced service-learning only.

Previous research has shown that values are relatively stable throughout one’s lifespan, and are predictors of how one lives one’s life. Hence the findings regarding shifts in rank order of values must be considered educationally significant, for these findings indicate that an ethical reflection component contributes above and beyond service-learning alone to the socio-moral development of adolescents.

Finally, it was noted that implementation and quality matter. The effects noted above were most apparent when the BDS curriculum was implemented as intended and when coupled with a quality service-learning experience for the students.