Special Topics, General

Special Topics in Service Learning

3-1-1997

Research Paper Youth Service

Douglas H. Stubbe

Research Paper
Youth Service

by

Douglas H. Stubbe
March 1, 1997

for

Jean Burkhardt

Experiential Education
for
Citizen Development
YOST 5130

An assumption that most people would probably agree on is that service to community, on a voluntary basis, builds character, self esteem, pride toward one's self and his/her community, develops personal growth and respect or compassion for others. I don't think many people look beyond that. Does the service need to be voluntary? Is service a responsibility that goes with being a part of a community? Why is service a positive aspect of community life? What are the characteristics of service that make it a fulfilling experience? Should youth be required to serve their community? If so, are there other options? Is service a community or school issue? Or both? There are many more questions, however; most people just know it's important, as do some of the youth that were surveyed or interviewed for this paper.

I've identified several questions that can or should be asked. The topic I researched for this paper is: What are the arguements for and against mandated service for graduation? Can it work in Red Wing, Minnesota? My motivation for asking and researching this topic is threefold. The more general purpose is because the question of mandated service as a graduation requirement has already been implemented in communities and states throughout the United States and is currently being considered in many more states. Specifically, I am serving on a committee in Red Wing that is addressing the results of a Search Institute survey of middle and high school students conducted in Red Wing during March and April of 1996. The survey helps to identify assests and liabilities for teenagers in a community. One of the committee's goals is "100% community service before graduation". Last is out of concern, I've witnessed agencies that take advantage of youth who are required to serve for various reasons.

In researching this topic I found myself supporting and then, not supporting mandated service. There are many strong arguements for both. There are also several opinion papers written about this subject. I intend to first define service and then take a look at national trends. With a basis of why we should be concerned about mandated service, I will then take a closer look at Red Wing, Minnesota. I think as you read this paper, you will find that I base most of my conclusion on what local youth workers, parents and the youth themselves had to say.

Service is defined as non-paid help provided to agencies or in an organized effort by two or more people to fill a void of "need" in a certain area. I will refer to it as non-paid because there is a question of whether service is voluntary when it is mandated. "Service learning isn't really volunteering, though, when it is required for high school graduation.... (Martin, p. 15)."

In researching service, all the recent material available makes at least one reference to the National and Community Service Act of 1990 (NCS). Without going into great detail, let's first take a look at NCS. NCS was enacted in an effort to create a nationwide service system to engage Americans of all ages, kindergartners to senior citizens, in meaningful service to their communities (Sagawa, p. 1). With this push from the federal government on down to the community, along with perceived problems among youth, cities like Washington, D.C., Atlanta, St. Louis, and Detroit, and the state of Maryland have already made service a requirement for graduation. "A study by the National Association of Independent Schools estimates that 25% of its member high schools require community service for graduation (Lewis, p. 8)." Another study suggests

3

that 4% of public schools and 14% of Catholic schools have a service requirement for graduation (Lewis, p. 8). Requirements range from 75 to 300 nonschool hours of service between grades 9 and 12. In some cases, students must write about their experiences. In others it is just quantitative. States with efforts underway to require service for graduation include Vermont, New York, Pennsylvania and Minnesota (Kahne, 1996).

There is a lot of data that supports the idea that service is, in part, an educational issue. In a 1985 assessment of literacy among young adults, ages 20 - 25, the National Assessment of Educational Progress found that one-third of those surveyed participated in community affairs (primarily church- or sports-related) and had literacy scores consistently 25 points higher than those who did not participate. Also, only 20% of the high school dropouts said they participated in community affairs (Lewis, p. 4). Studies of graduates from experimental schools that used curricula that emphasized problem-solving, extensive learning opportunities in the community, peer teaching, and student-faculty control over school governance indicated that 20 years later, these students were more successful than students from schools with limited opportunities in the community (Lewis, p. 4).

People such as Barber, a communitarian, believe service is a civic responsibility. "Without active citizens who see in service not the altruism of charity but the necessity of taking responsibility for the authority on which liberty depends, no democracy can function properly or, in the long run, even survive. ...It is an indispensable prerequisite of citizenship and thus a condition for democracy's preservation" (Barber, p. 8).

4

What are the component's of successful service? The NCS states that it must be meaningful (Sagawa, p. 3). Researchers write that quality programs are clearly stated, have useful goals, provide an intensity of experience, good supervision, allow time for reflection (Lewis, p. vi). From experience in recruiting, working with and supervising volunteers, Hennessy indicated that there must be a need for the service, the service must be meaningful and there has to be reflection (Hennessy, Appendix B). Responses from the student surveys show that need of the service was the number one consideration of students when deciding to help or not help (Survey, Appendix A). Edward Doty of Friends Seminary in New York City believes service should meet a real need, provide good supervision, and have time for reflection (Lewis, p. 16). After sorting through much of the research on service, I've narrowed the key components of service down to four. They are: need for the service, no conflict with paid positions, the service must be meaningful, and there needs to be reflection. This can easily be accomplished with a good line of communication with all partys involved and dedicated, sincere supervisors.

Service gets people involved in community issues. They become aware of what is going on in the community, who lives in the community and how people are affected by political decisions, manmade and natural occurances, crime, lack of employment or benefits, etc. As stated earlier, students tend to do better in school and later in life if they have been involved in school and community activities. In providing service, the old saying, "it's not what you know, but who you know" has some truth to it. Students providing service are actually, maybe not consciously, beginning to build a network of support for the future. Some students did address college applications - which sometimes

require references, career exploration and experience as reasons for helping in the community (Survey, Appendix A).

Service can also bring people of different backgrounds - economical, gender, religion, race, etc. - together in a neutral setting, enabling people to become more aware of diversity and developing more compasion towards people who are different. Keep in mind that diversity is not only race driven. "While several essayist propound the value of service programs as a means to unite a truly diverse population, no essay supports mandatory full-time service, perhaps the only way to ensure universal participation (Sagawa, p.3)." The issue of compasion, diversity, pride and unity were also addressed by students on questions 6-8 of the survey (Appendix A).

" . . . an adolescent who attends school, obeys laws. and avoids drugs is not necessarily equipped to meet the difficult demands of adulthood (Pittman, p.3)." Service can put the student/youth in the community early. Once students graduate, if not already old enough, they are within a few month of being considered adults by society's definition or old enough to legally vote. Through service they can begin to learn about issues in the community faced by adults every day. It enables young people in the community to apply what they learn in school to real life situations. Service provides a practical side to education. Again on question 8 of the survey (Appendix A) some students agree.

> Our children remain emotionally priceless but are generally viewed as economically useless, as liabilities rather than as assets to family units . A 1985 Minnesota Youth Poll showed that two-thirds of the statewide cross section of young people felt that adults do not respect them. Young people lack roles and meaning and purpose. They feel little stake in their community or country . . . and often turn to personally or socially destructive behaviors in order to vent their frustrations or instead succomb

to the abyss of despair, depression and self destruction. (National Youth Service, p.31)

With mandatory service in place, there are no garantees as to how much a person will learn or get involved in the community. As a minimum, young people will get into the community and become more aware of how things happen. That is a beginning. We can not force people to learn, we can only provide the opportunity.

"If required, one must first ask the question of the potential exploitation of the students who take part. Is it anything more than a ploy for the community to arrange free labor (Haskvitz, 1996)?" Will young people be taking jobs from individuals who would otherwise be paid for those jobs? Mandatory service, if done correctly and sincerely, can require a lot of resources to manage it. Haskitz suggests that the mere counting of hours spent on the job hardly make it relevent (1996). In addition to completing the community service, students should also study the problem they seek to solve. In Atlanta students are required to write a 500 word essay on their experience (Kahne, 1996). In Detroit they just put in the time (Lewis, p.8). I was unable to find information on how the programs are actually affecting the students and their communities.

Some people contend that required service is a violation of our rights. Schmidt (Appendix B) indicated that when service was required in his classes, parents would call and complain. He has since made service an elective for extra credit in his classes. Students in Pennsylvania, North Carolina and New York sued school boards on the grounds that mandatory service violates the constitutional prohibition of slavery. All three cases failed in court. In North Carolina, the judge cited arguments make by the

American Alliance for Rights and Responsibilities that service-learning is an educational initiative that prepares students for participation in society (Martin, p. 16). With the number of states and communities considering mandatory service, I think we can expect more challenges in court. That can be costly to school districts.

"Critics of education often point out that schools diminish the joy of learning. Now they run the risk of diminishing the joy of community service too (Martin, p. 16). This comment is also supported by students in the survey, citing that mandatory service would be less enjoyable and would take the "good" out of service (Survey, Appendix A). I am not sure that this is a valid argument because there are several ways of approaching mandatory service. However, perception can be as real as fact. When the subject of mandatory vs. voluntary service is brought up, many people say it is a family issue or the individuals choice.

In Atlanta, surveys of young people that indicated decreasing influence from those who convey values (e.g. teachers, churches) were cited in pushing through the service requirement (Lewis, p. 8). Lewis also writes: "the migration of mothers from household into the labor force has meant reduced participation in community organizations, like PTA, Scouting and others (p.5)." This is supported by Martinson who stated "I just had a good example in my life. My mom helps out a lot." I would never argue that families don't play an important role in determining the values our youth grow up with. I have often argued that family is the foundation of the community, the fact is, in today's society, the family is struggling and so are the communities.

What about Red Wing, Minnesota?

Red Wing is a community of approximately 16,000 people located 50 miles southeast of Minneapolis/St Paul on the Mississippi river. There isn't a lot of cultural diversity. It is primarily a christian, blue-collar community. Prairie Island Indian Reservation is located in Red Wing and there is a small representation of African Americans, Asians and Hispanics. The current high school is new (approximately 1 year old) with an enrollment of 1,172 students, grades 9 - 12. The middle school, grades 5 - 8, has an enrollment of 886 students. 103 students, three Junior and two Senior classes, were surveyed for the purpose of this paper.

I wrote eight questions that I wanted students to answer. I thought the questions were clear. After reading the results, I believe there was some confusion as to what I meant. I do believe that how the students percieved some of the questions is just as interesting. The questions and comments are included in Appendix A.

Of the 103 students, 32% stated they do not provide service in the community . Of the 68% that do, the majority do service through church. When asked why and what they consider before helping: helping others, self esteem, being needed and fun were the top four answers. Need of service, fun, who else is helping and who is receiving the help were the top four considerations. When asked if they've ever been required to do service, 31 answered yes. Of the 31, 74% (23) stated that it was a positive experience and six indicated it was a negative experience. This is supported in Cantigny citing that students often resented being required to do service but later found that they enjoyed it (p.

39). I'd also like to point out that of the six negative, only two or three were judicial requirements. Question 5 asks for two key differences between mandatory and voluntary service. This was interesting. Under mandatory students used words like forced, punishment, slavery, less fun, stressful, harder work, less self worth, no choice, and court ordered. Voluntary, as you can imagine, was the opposite, with descriptions like humane, appreciated, asset to society, more fun, makes a difference, etc. Question 6, asks if service is important to the health of the community. Ninety-one answered yes and four answered no. Students cited pride, quality of living, service as one part of community, interaction between diverse people, etc. for reasons.

Question 7, asks students if service is a civic responsibily. After talking to the classroom teacher and reading responces we agreed that many of the students didn't/don't know what civic means. This is a question that should probably have been rewritten for a more accurate assesment of student views. Forty said yes, 34 said no and 29 were N/A. Question 8 asks if service should be mandatory for graduation. Not surprisingly, 83 said no, and 20 said yes. Many of the comments reflected those already stated, however; a few of the new ones were job/time conflicts, STS only, freedom of choice, helping for no reason or benefit, learn compassion, plenty of time after graduation and school is for education.

In researching this paper, I also had the opportunity to speak informally with people. One day I spoke to three Middle School students helping out at the local Clothing Shelf. They indicated that they were there because they got out of a couple of classes to be there on a friday, two of them were fulfilling confirmation requirements and it was

fun. They also said they would only do it if they were with friends. I asked if there was

any reflection or discussion about their experience. All three said no, that there was no

discussion in school or in their confirmation classes.

One parent said that requiring teenagers to do service would not be beneficial. If

service is important to a community, required service should be targeted toward those

students that would be more receptive of it, elementary and middle school age. This

comment is supported by Lewis, who states focus on service should be early. "if the peak

age for 'joining' is the 11 - 14 age bracket, structured service programs should be the

focus before senior high school (Lewis, p. 18)."

I do believe that service is the responsibility of every citizen to be as involved as

possible in their community, civic responsibility. When this happens, people begin to

care about and meet others in the community. In many ways, service builds pride,

ownership and compassion within the community. I agree with Luhman (Appendix B),

that if service ever becomes mandated, there should be a well thought out plan in place

with people experienced in working with youth outside as well as inside the formal

education system to administer the program. Service is an educational issue. "Significant

life experiences grounded in repsonsibility, leadership and service to others are too often

absent from school and community-based education (National Youth Service, p. 31)." " .

. . service must come to be accepted across the board and not just for social studies and

citizenship courses (National Youth Service, p. 34)." Schools can offer elective service

courses as well as incorporate service into other classes. Service is not solely an

educational issue. It is also a community issue.

Businesses and local government also need to recognize the importance of service to a community. This can be accomplished through simple means. Employers should ask about service on their applications and during interviews, recognizing service as an enhancer for one's employability. Employers need to reinforce the value of service experience in the same way they recognize the value of education and work. Local leadership, private and public, should go on record that it believes "helping to meet the needs of others is a fundamental component of being an effective adult (Lewis, p. 8)."

Can mandatory service for graduation work in Red Wing? Yes, mandatory service can work in Red Wing. However, voluntary service should always be preferred and the first choice with a system and community culture that always reinforces the value of service or, more specifically, people in the community. If the issue of mandatory service should ever come up, then, the school and community should explore options such as requiring service for a younger age group. In any case, a service program should have a plan that includes all the components -- need, not taking a paid position, meaningful, and reflection -- of a fulfilling experience.

The plan should also take into consideration, the words of Pittman (p. 3) who suggests that most youth programs are focused on "fixing" adolescents engaged in risky behavior or preventing other youth from getting into trouble. The plan should include a clear understanding of why service is important and not just as another means to collect grant money to develop another fix it program. Service is not a program. It is a part of a community's culture; their identity.

Should service be mandatory? That is a question that each individual needs to answer for his or her self. They owe it to themselves to make an informed decision about this topic. Betty Wheeler, a principal at Metro High School in St. Louis tells incoming freshmen that the more talent they have, the more the responsibility they have to share. I've always told youth that skill and kowledge don't mean anything if you don't share it with anyone. In closing, I will say that the more voluntary service there is in a community, the less need there is for mandatory service. It becomes a part of that community's culture.

References

Barber, B. R. (1993). Visions of Service: The future of the National and Community Service Act. "A Mandate for Liberty". (National Women's Law Center and Youth Policy Forum). Washington, D.C.

The Cantigny Conference Series. (April 21-23, 1993). "Building a Consensus on National Service". Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation: Wheaton, IL.

Donovan, E. ((1995, September). Student Service Projects Prevent Crime. The Education Digest, 23-25.

Haskvitz, A. (1996, October). A community service program that can be validated. Phi Delta Kappan, 78, [Electronic Collection], RN A18850909.

Interviews. (1997, February). Appendix B.

Kahne, J., & Westheimer, J. (1996, May). In service of what? The politics of service learning. Phi Delta Kappan, 77, [Electronic Collection], RN A18434556.

Lewis, A. (1988, August) Facts and Faith: A status report on Youth Service. "Youth and America's Future: The William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Work, Family and Citizenship."

Martin, A. (1996, May-June). Citizenship or Slavery? Utne Reader, 75, 15-16.

"National Youth Service: A Democratic Institution for the 21st Century". (1991). National Service Secretariat: Washington, D.C.

Pittman, K. J., & Cahill, M. (1991, September). A New Vision, Promoting youth Development. Center for Youth Development.

Sagawa, S., & Halperin, S. (1993). Visions of Service: The future of the National and Community Service Act. "Introduction". (National Women's Law Center and Youth Policy Forum). Washington, D.C.

Survey of Red Wing High School students. (1997, February). Appendix A.

Appendix A

Student Questionaire

RWHS enrollment: 1,172   Surveyed: 103 or 9% of enrollment
3 Jr history and 2 Sr psychology classes

For purposes of this questionaire Community Service is defined as any service provided that is not considered to be your regular source of income or employment.

1) Do you help/provide service in this community? no   33 or 32%

70 or 68%; actual numbers reflect multiple answers

School	25
Church	43
Community at large	29

2) Why do you help? What is it that you personally gain from providing service?

Helping Others	26	Self Esteem	18
Being Needed/Self Worth	17	Fun/Enjoyable	16
Social	8	Sense of Accomplishment	8
Career Exploration	5	College Applications	4
Who/What being helped	3	Community	3
Class Grade	2	Confidence	2
Need of Service	2	Required	2

Meet new people, Judicial, Religious Duty, Respect for others, Self Conscience, each had 1

3) When deciding which activity or project to help with, what do you look for or consider? What is important to you?

Need of Service	26	Fun/Enjoyable	21
Who else is helping	10	Who's receiving service	9
How am I helping	8	Is it Interesting	7
Familiarity of Service	6	Environment (Outdoors)	6
Time/Schedule	5	Helping Others	5
Personal Growth	4	Career Exploration	3
Doesn't Matter	3	Host Person/Group	2
Skill Required	2	Gain Experience	1
Pride	1	Religious/Faith	1

4) Have you ever been required to do service or has it all been voluntary? If required please describe your experience: 80 students responded

Yes 31
No 49

Positive: 23 74% of 31		Negative: 6 19% of 31		N/A: 2	
Confirmation:	12	Judicial/Court Order:	6	Church:	4
Other:	4	Class Requirement:	3	Key Club:	1
Girl Scouts:	1				

5) Please identify one or two key differences, to you personally, between mandatory and voluntary service.

	Mandatory:	Forced	Punishment	Harder Work	Slavery
	Less Fun	Paid	Negative Attitude	Stressful	Pressure
		Court Ordered	Criminals & Delinquents	Less Quality Work	
		No Way Out	Less Selfworth	Less Willingness to Help	
		No Choice	Teaches a Lesson		

	Voluntary:	Humane	Appreciated	More Fun	Be Self
		Makes a Difference	Possitive Attitude	Freedom of Choice	
		Asset to Society	More Possitive Experience	More Personal Growth	

6) Is service important to the health of a community?   The individual?

Yes	91		Yes	83
No	4		No	9

Pride
Improves Quality of Living
Service is <u>one part</u> of Community
Only if provider wants to serve
People get along better
Problems keep reoccuring w/o service
Keeps a diverse community interacting

Get to work w/ others
Both build strength
Improves self worth
Improves independence

7) Is service a civic responsibility? Briefly explain:

Yes 40 39%   No 34 33%   N/A 29 28%

Pride, We all may need help someday
Only if you hurt somebody
As long as there are people in need
If you don't help, who will
Anyone who can, should
Others can do it instead of me
Keeps you out of trouble
Part of my Native American culture
Would maybe strengthen community attitudes
Just like family, everyone helps
People make a community what it is
Improves quality of community
So community grows as a whole
Learn new things
Community is responsibility of all
Because people are spoiled
Government shouldn't have to provide everything

Should be handled within Comm. agencies
Not everyone wants to help
Should stay voluntary
City's job
Shouldn't be forced
Individual Choice
We are all looking out for # 1
Depends on who you are
Everyone contributes just by living
Freedom of choice
But would make for a better community

8) Should service be mandatory for graduation? Yes   20 19%
   Why or Why not?   No   83 81%

Learn Compassion, Less likely to put down others   STS only   Personalities
Helping for no reason or benefit   Job/Time conflicts   Freedom of Choice
Enough to worry about   Not needed once we graduate
Half effort/ quanitative   Learn about community/life before graduation
Shouln't be forced   Would be difficult
Builds Community   Great Experience
Meet new friends   Less willing to help if required
Give back to community   Understand importance of community
Plenty of time after graduation   Experience real life situations
Removes the "good" from service   Some students already struggle with classes
Fewer people will graduate   Has nothing to do with school or graduation
So everyone can say they helped   Hard enough to graduate
Some lack the right temperament   Would get people involved in the community
School is for education   Just another obstacle
Takes away from idea of helping   Gain experience

Appendix B

Interviews

Wednesday, February 5, 1997; Paul Schmidt, Social Sciences Teacher at Red Wing High School

I spoke to Paul because he offers service for extra credit in his classes. He stated that up until about two years ago, service was required in his classes. Parents began to challenge the requirement as a violation of their children's rights and so he changed the requirment to an elective.

Friday, February 7, 1997; 3 eighth grade students, Twin Bluff Middle School

I spoke to the 3 students when I saw them helping at the Clothing Shelf in Red Wing. They informed me that each week (Fridays), if their grades are "C" or better, their social studies teacher takes three students to help at the Clothing Shelf. In return, they get out of school for a couple hours and each person can have one item from the merchandise.

- They stated that it is fun, and, in this case, two of them were also fulfilling a requirement for confirmation at their respective churches.

- They wouldn't do the work alone. Friends/peers were important.

- There was no reflection at school or at church. An adult just had sign off on the number of hours worked.

Monday, February 10, 1997; Tasha Luhman, YMCA Outreach Director & AmeriCorps Supervisor

- If service were required for graduation, this community [Red Wing] could handle it, but only with a plan already in place and a person to administer it.

- It must start early, not wait until senior year to start.

- Doesn't think it would conflict with other agencies requiring service i.e. scouts, 4-H, and churches.

- Although she doesn't require any reflection on service in her programs, she feels it is important.

Monday, February 10, 1997; Robyn Martinson, Student at Red Wing High School
Robyn's first service was when she was in middle school. Timers were needed for a USS swim meet and so she helped. She has since taught Sunday School for three years and supervises the nursery at church on Sunday mornings.

- She said that she plans to work with children as a profession and that the service has been fun.

- When the nursery job was posted in the church bulletin, they should have just addressed it to her because she knew it was right for her. Also, unless they could find another volunteer, the service probably wouldn't be offered.

- On reflection; No one has ever sat down with her and discussed the purpose/reason for service. She just knows it's right.

-Required; She has never been required to do service. In fact, she said "I just had a good example in my life. My mom helps out a lot."

Tuesday, February 11, 1997; Mark Hennessy, Executive Director, Red Wing Family YMCA
On mandatory service; Mark thinks it can work but only if all the components of service are in place: Need, Meaningful, Reflection, and not replacing paid staff. Additionally, the school would have to hire someone to administer the program.

With the current number of students in the schools [1100 at RWHS; 886 at TBMS] nonschool agencies such as the YMCA would also need to hire additional people to solely work with volunteers/service providers.

It would be better if we can develop a system that helps students/young people realize the importance of community and service without requiring it for graduation.