Project Summaries

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Strengthening and Supporting Service-Learning Objectives

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"Strengthening and Supporting Service-Learning Objectives"

A project of the Institute for Global Ethics
Funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation

Pilot Project Grant: 11/1/94 – 4/30/96
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Introduction

In the fall of 1994, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation gave a pilot grant to the Institute for Global Ethics to develop and demonstrate a methodology that incorporates a values-based orientation and reflection component into a selected number of service-learning programs across the country. A continuing two-year grant to expand the initiative got under way in December, 1996.

Strategy

The Institute's strategy involved integrating an ethics training component into selected service-learning programs in order to strengthen and support expected service-learning outcomes. This strategy—based on a process described in Dr. Rushworth M. Kidder's recent book, *How Good People Make Tough Choices: Resolving the Dilemmas of Ethical Living*—was tested in two pilot schools, using a secondary curriculum, *Building Decision Skills*, developed by the Institute. Pilot schools were John Marshall High School in Los Angeles, California and Putnam High School in Springfield, Massachusetts. In the continuing project, Orono High School in Orono, Maine and Marquette High School outside of St.

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Louis, Missouri were added. Schools were selected based on criteria such as strong, established leadership; openness to new ideas; school-community connection already established; and service-learning program already in place.

A quasi-experimental, non-equivalent pre- and post-test research design, with control group, was used. The research questions of the study required that students be assessed before and after experiencing one of three conditions: service-learning with an ethical reasoning component, service-learning without an ethical reasoning component, and no service-learning, or control.

A total of twelve teachers and 425 students participated in the pilot study. Twenty-two teachers and more than 1800 students participated in the continuing study, although not all students could be included in the findings since many only completed either the pre-test or the post-test, but not both. Using the services of evaluator James S. Leming, Professor at Southern Illinois University, the Institute said it would assess the results of this effort according to several key questions. Among these questions were:

- Do students have a clearer sense of their role as ethical actors within the community? Are they better able to recognize moral issues and make ethical decisions?
- Is there a "value added" effect on students' moral/social development as a result of integrating ethical decision-making activities into service-learning programs?

Project Results

The project was evaluated in 1996 and in 1998 both qualitatively and quantitatively. Quantitative data were derived from student pre- and post-tests.

(1) Qualitative Results (teacher interviews and observations): The big questions, of course, were: How have things changed? Teachers identified at least three areas where, based on their observations, changes had begun to occur. Students, they said, appear to:

- think more clearly,
- speak more openly, and
- understand more deeply.

Students appear to think more clearly:

"I think the kids have become more thoughtful; more thoughtful of each other, but also just more thoughtful overall. The snap decisions, the snap comments, don't come quite as easily. I think there's more processing going on before they speak" (Teacher, Putnam HS).

Students speak more openly:

"I think the most important thing is that . . . they have been able to verbally vocalize their feelings about issues, that they actually say things out loud. I know that sounds very elementary. But when they say it, then it's very meaningful to them" (Teacher, JMHS).

<u>Students appear to have deepened their understanding of issues, as well as other people's feelings:</u>

"For example, I had them write an essay on diversity, where they have a dilemma either with their parents, or where their parents are immigrants who are having a problem adjusting to the 'American way of life.' . . . One young man said that he was sorry now that he had not listened to his father and learned Chinese, because he figured he was an American and he would not need Chinese. And now that he thinks back on it, had he put himself in his father's place, he probably would have made the effort. So in their writings they are solving dilemmas that they have had" (Teacher, JMHS).

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<u>The intersection of ethics and service-learning:</u> During the course of the project, a number of current ethical dilemmas surfaced for discussion. At Putnam High School, for example, planning for a community blood drive generated a class-wide ethical discussion:

"One of the students was planning a blood drive and we had several students in the community service-learning class that are Jehovah's Witnesses. The issue came up as to the right or wrong of being able to donate blood <versus> holding by your religious commitments that say you cannot donate blood or even work on a project that promotes the donation of blood. And they brought it into the realm of an ethical dilemma, right versus right" (Teacher, Putnam HS).

<u>Students (from Marquette HS) had their own take on the ethics lessons:</u>

Will I always follow the rules or will I make up my own mind?"

"When I started high school, I felt that my values were somebody else's. Now I feel that they are my own."

"The lessons stay with you a little bit. You look at what you did—say, over the weekend—differently. It's not like you leave the classroom and immediately forget every thing you've talked about."

(2) Quantitative Results (pre-/post-test findings):

Based on pre- and post-test results, service-learning students who also experienced the *Building Decision Skills* curriculum were more likely to:

- interpret a situation as having an ethical dimension
- take personal responsibility for resolving the situation
- analyze the situation from the perspective presented in the curriculum

They also were more likely to:

- develop a sense of responsibility to their school
- rank 3 values—honesty, community, and responsibility—higher than other students

Previous research has shown that values are relatively stable throughout one's life span and are predictors of how one lives one's life. Hence these findings are significant in that they indicate that an ethical reflection component contributes above and beyond service-learning alone to the socio-moral development of adolescents.

It is important to note that the above positive effects occurred only when the program was implemented as intended and when students were engaged in quality service-learning experiences.

> " It made me think about what kind of person I am."

The Ethics & Service Curriculum

A third outcome of the project is a new secondary curriculum that weaves the Institute's ethical decision-making process (the subject of the *Building Decision Skills* curriculum) and the service-learning process into a series of twelve lessons. Titled *Ethics and Service: A values-based approach to community service-learning*, the curriculum is intended to simplify the teacher's job by providing step-by-step instructions for combining these two very powerful sets of teaching tools. The lessons are highly reflective, encouraging students to be deeply thoughtful at every step along the way.

For more information, contact the Institute for Global Ethics, P.O. Box 563, Camden, Maine 04843. Phone: 800-729-2615. E-mail: education@globalethics.org. Web Site: www.globalethics.org.