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## A SURVEY OF ACTION-LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

By: Donald J. Eberly  
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This is a preliminary report on a survey of Action-Learning opportunities conducted in the Spring of 1972. The survey director was Allan Cameron; a grant from the White House Conference on Youth enabled a number of persons ages 15-20 to participate in the survey.

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As an ever-changing society advances in time, inevitably some aspects will be in step with the times, still others out ahead, and some will be lagging. As described in an earlier paper<sup>1</sup>, perhaps the most serious deficiency today is the absence of acceptable means for adolescents to become adults.

Granted, virtually all young people who are today 15 will, six years from now, be 21. But how many will be adults in other than a chronological sense? How many will be able to test themselves in the real world to see who they are and who they want to become? How many will be able to get an interesting job and hold on to it? How many will derive from their formal education something more than a piece of paper?

The earlier paper reviews the evidence that traditional avenues of growth, such as jobs, military service, and relevant education, are simply not available to millions of young people today. It suggests a form of experiential education - called Action-Learning - which could become a major new avenue of growth for the young who cannot find jobs, are turned off by military service, or see no meaning in formal education.

Action-Learning would guarantee young people a chance to participate in society, and to do so in a way that maximizes the learning potential of such experiences. Some would serve part-time during the school year, others full-time for a year or two; some would get academic credit and others would not; some would get paid and some would not; some would serve locally and others far from home. With the number of 15-20 year olds comprising over 10% of the nation's population, at any one time several million young people might be engaged in Action-Learning.

As promising as this approach sounds, it raises many questions. This paper describes the outcomes of a survey that was designed to respond to such questions, and to establish hypotheses for pilot Action-Learning programs. Of primary interest, of course, is the demand side of the equation. Since a make-work program would be unacceptable to young people and antithetical to the Action-Learning concept, the first question is, "How many are needed?" Then, in rapid order, one poses the following queries:

What will they do?

Who will train them?

Who will supervise them?

How much will it cost?

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<sup>1</sup>"American Youth in the Mid-Seventies", by Robert Havighurst, Richard A. Graham, and Donald Eberly, National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin, Vol. 56, No. 367, November, 1972

Recognizing that such questions cannot be answered fully until empirical data are in from test projects of some magnitude, a survey (Appendix A) of the service needs of three communities was made in the Spring of 1972. The communities surveyed are Portland, Oregon, an urban area; Prince George's County, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, D. C.; and Sheboygan County, Wisconsin, a relatively rural area.

The survey was directed to all public and non-profit community service and educational institutions in the geographical areas. Responsible officials were interviewed by high school students who had received instruction in the survey process. In some cases, the way had been prepared for them, e.g., the school superintendent had written to all his elementary school principals to ask that they cooperate in providing the data. But not every institution could be reached in the time available and a few questionnaires were completed so poorly as to be worthless. Hence, some extrapolation was necessary to obtain the total number of service-learning opportunities in the areas surveyed.

The students who did the interviewing knew little about Action-Learning and were unfamiliar with the kinds of projects which have been developed in other communities. Many of the prospective employers were equally uninformed and some were reluctant to estimate the number of work assignments they would have. A number of follow-up phone calls were placed to question the respondents who appeared to have been uncertain about what was being asked. When they were given additional information on how an Action-Learning project would work, the great majority of respondents increased the numbers of work opportunities they would offer. This call-back on a sample of respondents suggests that the survey results may be conservative.

In each area, up to 25 young people spent a week or more visiting hundreds of community service agencies, both public and private non-profit. After obtaining some information on the activity being surveyed, they asked how many young people the organization would accept under an Action-Learning program for which all costs were covered externally. Table I shows the results, broken down by type of activity and extrapolated to the nation at large.

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The basic unit for data reduction in the survey is the number of Action-Learning man hours per week requested by the official being interviewed. For the purpose of this paper, this number is divided by 40 to yield full-time equivalents. The national estimates were extrapolated directly from the ratio of populations.

TABLE I

Demand for Action-Learning Participants by Type of Activity in Three Communities Surveyed and Extrapolated to Nation at Large (Full-time Equivalent)

	<u>Three Communities</u>	<u>Nationwide*</u>
Education	4,680	1,065,000
Health	330	75,000
Environment	30	7,000
Social	1,130	258,000
Protection	150	34,000
Other	<u>250</u>	<u>57,000</u>
TOTAL	6,590	1,496,000

It depends on who pays.

In order to determine the influence of the source of the financing of an Action-Learning program, respondents were asked this dual question:

1. How many young people aged 15-20, inclusive, would your activity accept under a program of service-learning coordinated by the local secondary school system?
  - a. If your activity simply provides the job descriptions and defines specific entry-level skills necessary, how many such young people would you accept ---
  - b. If your activity must take full responsibility for the selection, training, supervision, and whatever costs there may be for transportation, meals, insurance and the like, how many would you accept ---

Table II suggests that four times as many young people could expect to participate in a subsidized program than in an unsubsidized program. Obviously, there are many intermediate options between (a) and (b), and we should expect the participation rate to vary inversely with the level of financial responsibility of the host activity.

\* Exact figures not yet final.

Between options (a) and (b), the range varied from two to one in Portland to six to one in Prince George's County. By service area, the lowest ratio of subsidized to unsubsidized programs was two to one in the health area, and the highest ratio was almost six to one in the social services.

TABLE II

Action-Learning Hours per Week Adjusted for  
Total Population of Respective Areas

<u>By Geographic Area</u>	<u>1(a)-Little Cost</u>	<u>1(b)-Full Cost</u>
Portland	51,521	24,082
Prince George's County	182,640	31,705
Sheboygan County	<u>28,675</u>	<u>8,165</u>
TOTAL	262,836	63,952

  

<u>By Service Area</u>	<u>1(a)-Little Cost</u>	<u>1(b)-Full Cost</u>
Education	187,088	46,021
Health	13,114	6,022
Environmental	1,232	360
Social	45,207	8,087
Protection	6,172	1,393
Other	<u>10,023</u>	<u>2,069</u>
TOTAL	262,836	63,952

What will they do?

As was hypothesized, the great majority of openings, some 71% of the total, is to be found in the field of education; most of them are at the elementary and secondary school level. They would serve primarily as tutors and teacher aides.

The next largest demand, some 17% of the total, is in the field of social services. Nearly one-half the demand is in day care centers and about the same proportion exists in welfare and anti-poverty programs.

The various aspects of health services constitute 5% of the total demand, which is fairly evenly distributed among hospitals, nursing homes, and mental health institutions. However, in a program where the sponsor assumed all costs, the majority of positions would be found in nursing homes.

Nearly 3% of the demand is in the field of recreation and just over 2% in the protective services - police, sheriff's office, fire, ambulance, and rescue work.

A surprisingly small demand, less than 1%, is found in the environmental field. The reason is probably due to the fact that the responsibility for many environmental activities rests at the state or federal level, while these surveys were taken at the city or county level.

Table III summarizes the demand by field, and between subsidized and unsubsidized programs.

The tasks to be done vary widely, and suggest an appeal to a broad spectrum of Action-Learning participants. Table IV is a compilation of the tasks identified in the survey.

The response to several questions suggest both a receptiveness to the service-learning concept and a willingness to share in its administration and costs. For example, the response to the question, "Do you have prepared or will you prepare specific job descriptions?" was 96% positive and the same high proportion of respondents said they would provide the necessary training for participants. At the same time, they indicated that they did not want to assume responsibility for basic education; that should remain with the schools.

A greater variation was found in a series of questions dealing with staff increases and supervision. Nine out of ten respondents were positive, many of them enthusiastically so, over the prospects of having a member of VISTA serve on the staff. But if the activity itself had to pay for staff increases, only 22% said that they would. Thirty-three percent said "no", and the remaining 45% did not answer because they had indicated a staff increase would not be necessary. Where this holds true, 87% said they could absorb the probable increase in supervisory and training workload resulting from participation in an Action-Learning program.

Interviewers also asked what detrimental effects the program might have on the activity. Where this question was answered, it reflected an attitude toward the participants as children rather than as persons undergoing a maturational experience. A few respondents referred to "fooling around", "disrupting staff", and "lack of experience". One respondent, a community school director who asked for thirty-two full-time and forty part-time Action-Learning participants, was concerned about program administration:

TABLE III

Action-Learning Hours per Week Adjusted for Total  
Population of Respective Areas, by Service Function.

	<u>Total for Three Sites</u>			
	<u>Little Cost Option a</u>	<u>Hours/week* per person</u>	<u>Full Cost Option b</u>	<u>Hours/week* per person</u>
Education	187,088	1.90	46,021	0.45
Elem & Sec	170,338		31,161	
Other	16,750		14,860	
Health	13,114	0.14	6,022	0.06
Hospitals	3,260		500	
Nursing Homes	5,229		4,668	
Mental Health	3,377		561	
Other	1,248		293	
Environmental	1,232	0.01	360	
National Res	440		120	
Other	792		240	
Social	45,207	0.45	8,087	0.09
Day Care	20,030		1,600	
Welfare	3,794		2,212	
Paroles Probation	216		96	
Geriatrics	808		414	
Legal	230		0	
Youth Service	3,980		1,845	
Other	16,149		1,920	
Protection	6,172	0.06	1,393	0.01
Police, Sheriff	2,273		1,393	
Fire, Rescue	3,899		0	
Other	10,023	0.10	2,069	0.02
Public Works	0		0	
Recreation	7,335		1,070	
Library	1,258		119	
Mayor's Office	160		0	
Other	1,270		880	
		2.66		0.63

\* Exact figures not yet final



TABLE IV

Examples of Tasks for Which Action-Learning Participants Are Needed

Semi-Professional

- Interview People
- Conduct Survey
- Develop Youth Programs
- Write Book Reviews
- Tutor and Teacher's Aides
- Counseling
- Write Pamphlets
- Coordinate Volunteers
- Health Education
- Library Research
- Recreation Supervisor
- Storytelling to Children

Clerical

- Secretary
- File Clerk
- Typist
- Switchboard Operator

Skilled

- Graphics
- Reproduction
- Transport Children & Adults
- Maintain Equipment
- Physical Therapy
- Key Punching
- Music
- Drawing Maps
- Planning Exhibits

Semi-Skilled and Unskilled

- |                 |                                      |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------|
| Shelve Books    | Janitorial Work                      |
| Correct Papers  | Laundry                              |
| Craftsman Aide  | Housekeeping                         |
| Nurses Aide     | Forestry Aides                       |
| Laboratory Aide | Park Maintenance                     |
| Fill out Forms  | Make Braille Books and Talking Books |

If such a program were conducted which left the selection, training, and supervision of these volunteers to this agency - and given the funding of this program by an outside agency - this program could have only positive effects on this agency, assuming the good faith and dedication of the volunteers and said outside agency.

Finally, the surveys asked what other conditions should be established for an Action-Learning program. Here, the emphasis focused on participants' attitudes and behavior. They must:

Be punctual

Have a sincere desire to help

Desire to learn

Abide by the rules

Also, recognizing the importance of a program balanced between action and learning, some mention was made of the need for good communications between schools and the agencies where the participants were serving.

As indicated earlier, the survey results should not be looked upon as conclusive evidence, but can form the bases for a set of hypotheses that should be put to the test. The hypotheses suggested largely by this survey include the following:

- 1) The profile and magnitude of demand for Action-Learning participants will be in accord with that indicated in Tables X and Y and Z.
- 2) The bulk of the supervision and training responsibilities will be assumed by the host agencies.
- 3) The major exception to the above statement will be in agencies needing to add staff to meet these responsibilities; such agencies will accept a VISTA or other full-time, paid volunteer to take on such assignments.

TABLE X

Projected Distribution of Action-Learning Participants in a Community  
of 100,000 Population at any Time During the School Year

Age	15 - 17		18 - 20		TOTAL (FTE)
	Full Time	Part Time	Full Time	Part Time	
Education	25	600	125	500	500
Health	0	30	15	40	40
Social	5	200	40	90	125
Environment	0	5	2	5	5
Protection	0	5	10	10	5
Other	0	40	10	20	15
TOTAL	30	880	202	665	715

TABLE Y

Projected Distribution of Action-Learning Participants in a Community  
of 100,000 Population during the Summer

Age	15 - 17		18 - 20		TOTAL (FTE)
	Full Time	Part Time	Full Time	Part Time	
Education	25	90	60	90	140
Health	5	20	12	25	30
Social	25	70	40	60	105
Environmental Protection	0	5	2		5
	0	5	12	12	20
Other	<u>5</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>30</u>
TOTAL	60	240	138	204	330

TABLE Z

Projected Number of Action-Learning Participants in a Community of 100,000  
During One Year

	Full Time	Part Time	Total
First Semester	232	1545	1777
Second Semester	232	1545	1777
Summer	<u>198</u>	<u>444</u>	<u>642</u>
TOTALS	662	3534	4196
No. of different people	250	2500	2750

## SELECTED SURVEY ITEMS

- 1) Would you require any specific ages or educational levels of the 15-20 year olds? If so, please specify, with reasons.

No preference - 68%

Ages 17-20 - 32%

- 2) How long could the individual young people expect to be at your activity?

a. Calendar 47%

b. Full School Year 50%

c. Summer 1%

- 3) a. What types of work would the young people be expected to do?

(see Tables III and IV)

- b. Do written job descriptions exist now for the positions, or, if not, would job descriptions be written?

YES 96%

NO 3%

- 4) Could/would your activity provide any necessary training, or should other specific activities provide it? If others, please specify with reasons.

YES 96%

NO 4%

- 5) As a result of such a program, if a staff increase is necessary, would you still request young people be sent to your activity?

YES 39%

NO 15%

NO ANSWER 46%

SELECTED SURVEY ITEMS (continued)

5) continued:

Would your activity pay all, or part, of the salaries for any needed staff increases?

YES 21%                      NO 33%                      NO ANSWER 46%

Would your activity accept staff personnel who are themselves volunteers (such as VISTA, University Year for ACTION, etc.)?

YES 84%                      NO 8%

If no staff change is necessitated, could the probable increase in supervisory and training workload be absorbed by your activity?

YES 87%                      NO 3%

The previous paper<sup>2</sup> showed that a very substantial number, well over one million, of young people do not find in such traditional avenues as employment and formal schooling, a successful path for maturation. This paper suggests that there is a demand for such young people that is of the same order of magnitude. While it will serve to be a perfect match in every case, the complementarity of needs with resources makes a compelling case for the testing of the above hypotheses on a significant scale.

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid, Page 1