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Service-Learning as an Integrated Experience in K-5 Education: An Introduction to Resources and Information.

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ABSTRACT

Some educators contend that students who engage in activities related to school subjects learn more efficiently and more effectively, and remember what they have learned much longer than students who do not. Service-Learning (S-L) can provide a central focus around which educational change can occur. Moreover, S-L enhances the ideas promoted by various circles of school reform. Theodore Sizer's nine principles and David Berliner's management of teaching are a few of the philosophies that provide the sound theoretic foundation for instituting S-L programs. Kate McPherson (1989) suggests S-L facilitates school reform while providing an expanded pedagogy to meet the learning styles and needs of all students, making learning relevant and exciting and necessitating critical thinking about what has been learned. Several examples of "serving with meaning" demonstrate the power of S-L as a classroom strategy. S-L becomes part of the educational process in elementary school programs when it is integrated into curriculum areas. This integration comes readily since S-L is often a natural extension of the content and skills already being developed in the classroom and does not distract but rather enhances existing curriculum. (Contains 11 book resources and a video resource). (BT)

Service-Learning as an Integrated Experience in K-5 Education: An Introduction to Resources and Information.

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**Service-Learning as an Integrated
Experience in K-5 Education:
An Introduction to Resources and Information**

by
**Lisa J. Laplante
&
Carol Kinsley**

**Community Service Learning Center
Springfield, Massachusetts**

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*The Community Service Learning Center is a partner in the
National Service-Learning Cooperative:
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Service-Learning(S-L) as an Integrated Experience in K-5 Education: An Introduction to Resources and Information*

by Lisa J. Laplante, M.Ed. and Carol W. Kinsley, Ed.D.

Community Service Learning Center, Springfield, MA

Spring, 1994

Grounded in Theory**

Since the early 1980s, many educational and political leaders have begun to advocate that our young people become involved in their communities. With this recommendation comes the hope that students will recognize how to balance the rights of citizenship with the responsibilities of community membership. The position which views education as the stage for accomplishing this end is grounded in both common sense and in sound educational theory; it goes all the way back to Aristotle. In our own century, John Dewey, and more recently, Ralph Tyler and Hilda Taba have reminded us that students who actually *do* things--who engage in activities related to school subjects--learn more efficiently, more effectively, and remember what they have learned much longer than students who don't.

For Dewey, it had to do with the fact that the mind is social not individual and thus learning comes from social activities. For Tyler and Taba, the point was simply that "learning occurs through the active behavior of the student. It is what [the student] learns, not what the teacher does." (Tyler, 1949) These principles have been borne out by study after study, and in the work of such widely respected and diverse educators as Jean Piaget, James Coleman, and David Kolb, to name a few.

Service Learning (S-L)[†] can provide a central focus around which educational change can occur. Examples of Service Learning validate the research of Goodlad and Oakes which holds that "curriculum best suited to providing all students with access to knowledge is organized around central concepts of the disciplines and grounded in real-life experiences ." (1988, p. 19) Moreover, S-L enhances the ideas promoted by various circles of school reform. Theodore Sizer's nine principles and David Berliner's management of teaching are a few of the philosophies that provide the sound theoretic foundation for

* The following piece resulted from written and verbal dialogue with experienced Service-Learning practitioners and members of the National Technical Advisory Group for this project.

** Adapted from "What is Community Service Learning?" an address made by Carol W. Kinsley, Ed.D on May 4, 1994 in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

† Also known as Community Service Learning (CSL)

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instituting Service Learning programs. As a school successfully implements S-L, school reform become more than theory. S-L provides a focus, a central theme around which school reform can occur and places the school in the context of the community.

Kate McPherson (1989) writes that S-L becomes a unique expression of a school and its community as it provides a powerful way to integrate current educational reform recommendations with critical community concerns. Further, she suggests S-L facilitates school reform while providing an expanded pedagogy to meet the learning styles and needs of all students, making learning relevant and exciting and necessitating critical thinking about what has been learned. Serving as a catalyst for school reform, S-L invites new visions of school restructuring.

The following resource provides a general framework for elementary teachers who want to integrate service learning into their school program. Created for the National Service-Learning Cooperative: K-12 ServeAmerica Clearinghouse in Minnesota, the piece results from a collaboration among experienced practitioners belonging to the National Technical Advisory Group.

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- Berliner, David. (1983, September). "The executive functions of teaching." *Instructor Magazine*, 29-39.
- Kinsley, Carol. (1992). *A case study: the integration of community service learning into the curriculum by an interdisciplinary team of teachers at an urban middle school*. A dissertation submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts/Amherst.
- Goodlad, John I. & Oakes, Jeannie. (1988, February). "We must offer equal access to knowledge." *Educational Leadership*, 45 (5), 16-22.
- McPherson, Kate. (1989). *Learning through service*. Seattle: Safeco Insurance Co.
- Sizer, Theodore. (1985). *Horace's compromise*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.
- Taba, Hilda. (1962). *Curriculum development theory and practice*. New York: San Francisco Press.
- Tyler, Ralph. (1949). *Basic principles of curriculum and instruction*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
-

National Technical Advisory Group, 1994

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Masha Rudman, Perspectives in Children's Literature, Amherst, MA
Joanne Wilson-Keenan, Springfield Public Schools, Springfield, MA
Elaine Woo, Seattle Public Schools, Seattle, WA

Serving with Meaning

"What I have found by having service learning integrated into science is that it forces integration across all subject areas. It could be seen as a tool for integrating the subjects." Elaine Woo, Assistant Principal, Bryant Elementary School, Seattle, WA

- After learning about the alphabet, children in a kindergarten class designed and contributed a page to an alphabet coloring book. The class book was presented to preschoolers in a Head Start daycare.
- A first grade teacher had her students interview elderly members in their community and then chronicle these histories in a book for the town and school libraries.
- First and second graders learned about team work and service while reading stories about quilts. As a result, students sponsored a quilting bee to collect student/parent made quilts for babies with AIDS. A connection with math was made as students measured and cut the material into accurate squares.
- A second grade class built a supermarket in class. Using the project to learn about math, the students also studied recycling issues. The class designed a pamphlet to educate their families and community.
- Third and fourth graders learned about hunger and homelessness while growing a vegetable garden in the backyard of an elderly center. Regular visitations were made in which the students and a senior partner worked on their plot. Part of the produce went to the senior partner, the other to a homeless shelter.
- Fifth graders explored topics like animal habitats, soil, and recycling natural resources in science class. To complement this learning, they spent a class day creating a conservation area in a former ravine making trails, planting shrubs and developing a sledding area.
- Beginning as the evolution of a CSL inclusion model, a fifth grade language arts class worked with their school's developmental skills class and learned about their partners physical and mental disabilities. Assisting the special needs students with classroom assignments, they recorded their experience in a log which was later used to create picture books about the partnership.

Each of the above examples demonstrates the power of Service-Learning as a classroom strategy. S-L actively connects the classroom with the community, providing opportunities for experiential learning. Elementary teachers find that this methodology helps students recognize the usefulness of new knowledge as they apply it in real settings while serving their communities. Moreover, it promotes social and personal development, supporting the growth of the whole child. With S-L:

- subjects become less compartmentalized and more integrated; projects may be related to a single subject or expanded into an interdisciplinary unit.

- student learning is more active and meaningful.
- opportunities for developing comparative and critical thinking skills increase.
- ample opportunity to develop basic skills of reading, writing and computation exists.
- both cognitive and affective growth are strongly promoted.
- classroom learning gains relevancy as students process and reflect upon new information while exploring the relation between school subjects and real life.
- new concepts are related more readily to standard curriculum when teachers refer to concrete examples familiar to students.
- assessment becomes more authentic and legitimate.
- community support of schools is strengthened and vital allies are recruited.

Support for Standard Curriculum

"In the early evening darkness ("Hurry up, Mom!") and flashlight in hand, my son and I walked through Ravenna Park to the area of the creek he and his class shared in 'adopting' to restore/preserve/protect. The outward excitement, inner satisfaction and intimate relation was so wonderfully evident as he spotlighted the perimeter of the fenced safety net and each of the many individual plantings. We talked of how helpful this project was in terms of the environment. Service-Learning integrated into the hands-on science enables students to pursue a depth of richness of experience unmatched!" -5th grade parent.

In a time when schools are often criticized for having limited relevance and worth to students, the S-L teaching method awakens new visions of education. By moving beyond the four walls of traditional education and using the community as a classroom, teachers can provide meaningful and exciting settings for productive learning while allowing children to engage in experiences that respond to their development needs for concrete, hands-on learning.

Since the standard elementary curriculum already covers "family" and "community," the effort to include S-L takes just a little imagination. While it is common for young students to visit community agencies like fire stations and police headquarters, they are rarely asked to contribute actively during these outreaches. Linking these visits with an identifiable "problem" provides the students with the opportunity to reflect critically and act strategically. For example, a class might investigate fire safety by participating in

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an information-gathering trip to a local station. Their findings may then be distributed to the school or outside community. Their projects could involve educating other children about fire safety, learning about the importance of smoke detectors and working to ensure that all students' homes have one. While engaged in this project, students would be using language arts skills like organizing information and presenting it orally and in writing.

Unlike traditional community service, which is often relegated as an after school activity, Service-Learning has become an accepted classroom methodology. S-L helps students become early community "citizens" as they learn how school subjects and skills relate to the world in which they live. In the process, S-L is legitimized as a regular feature of the elementary classroom.

S-L becomes part of the educational process in elementary school programs when it is integrated into curriculum areas. This integration comes readily since S-L is often a natural extension of the content and skills already being developed in the classroom and does not distract rather enhances existing curriculum. Teachers may either take an existing unit and identify where Service Learning fits into it or they may pick a new theme and build service and academics around it. In this way, by selecting a service theme and either building *it into* an already established unit or building *it around* a new unit, service-learning becomes unified with the learning process, instead of an extra task for teachers to add to an already busy day. This approach allows educational content objectives to be achieved through active learning as well as traditional learning methods.

For the Benefit of All

At the 1992 National Service Learning Conference in Everett, Washington, when asked by an adult in a breakout session, "What did you learn from this [intergenerational] project?", a kindergartner was able to verbalize, "I learned how to make a friend, and that is a good thing!"

Overall, S-L lays the foundation for a lifetime ethic of applying habits and skills learned to strengthen the community and improve and enrich the lives of all. Incorporating this methodology into the elementary program establishes a learning community in which both the givers and receivers benefit. Service-Learning adds depth to the elementary program by,

- exposing and involving students in the community which elicits excitement and inspiration to learn how to communicate.

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- giving students the chance to contribute actively to the community and leading them to gain less tangible but equally essential skills like cooperation, empathy and citizenship.
- offering the unequivocal benefit of boosting self-esteem as students become empowered to make changes and improve their world.
- instilling in students an awareness, understanding, and appreciation of community, the value of citizenship, and the responsibility each citizen has to help others for the benefit of the community.

Recommended Resources

BOOKS

- Caduto, Michael J. and Bruchac, Joseph. (1991). *Keepers of the animals: Native American stories and activities for children*. Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing. A work of environmental lessons interwoven with the cultural heritage of Native Americans. This gathering of carefully selected Native American animal stories and related activities for children, ages five through twelve, promotes responsible stewardship toward all animals on Earth, including human beings. Address: 350 Indiana Street, Golden, Colorado 80401, (800) 992-2908
- Conrad, Dan and Hedin, Diane. (1987) *Youth service: a guidebook for developing and operating effective programs*. Washington, DC: Independent Sector. This work provides suggestions for setting up community service programs. Address: 1828 L Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20036, (202) 223-8100
- Gardner, Howard. (1991) *The Unschooled Mind: how children think and how schools should teach*. New York, NY: Basic Books. Merging cognitive science with educational agenda, Gardner shows how ill-suited our minds and natural patterns of learning are to current educational materials, practices, and instructions, and makes an eloquent case for restructuring our schools.
- Kroloff, Rabbi Charles A. (1993). *54 ways you can help the homeless*. Southport, CT: Hugh Lauter Levin Associates, Inc. Offers specific ideas on helping the homeless. Address: 2507 Post Road, Southport, CT 06490
- Learning by Giving: K-8 service-learning curriculum guide*. (1993). St. Paul, MN: National Youth Leadership Council. A concrete guide including planning formats, sample lesson plans, program ideas, curriculum connections, and resource materials that can mobilize elementary and middle school students in youth service programs. Address: 1910 West County Road B, St. Paul, MN 55113, (612) 631-3672
- Martz, Sandra, ed. (1987). *When I am an old woman I shall wear purple*. Wastonville, CA: Papier-Mache Press. A collection of poems and short stories about aging women. A good resource for using in an intergenerational project.

Myers, Carol, ed. (1993). *William Penn Service Learning School #49 guidebook for service learning*. Indianapolis, IN: Project Leadership-Service. A "Teacher Friendly" guidebook intended to be a resource to teachers as they begin or continue the journey of helping students grow and learn through the service learning process. Based on the experience of the staff of a school engaged in service learning. Address: 1720 West Wilkins, Indianapolis, IN 46221

Rudman, Masha Kabakow. (1984). *Children's literature: an issues approach, 2nd ed.* New York: Longman. A teaching tool that shows teachers and others who work with children how to use children's books to teach about important social and personal issues. Address: 95 Church St., White Plains, NY 10601

Sergiovanni, Thomas J. (1994). *Building Community in Schools*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, Inc. The author explains why a sense of community is so vital to the success of any school, and he shows teachers, parents, and administrators what they can do to rebuild it.

The service learning planning and resource guide. (1994). Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers. This guide, designed to help schools and other agencies design Service Learning projects, gives categories of different federal funding sources. Address: One Massachusetts Ave., NW, Ste. 700, Washington, DC 20001

Whole learning through service: A guide for integrating service into the curriculum, K-8. (1991) Springfield, MA: Community Service Learning Center. A manual for principals and teachers which provides service learning experiences that can be used to generate learning in content areas. Address: 258 Washington Blvd. Springfield, MA 01108, (413) 734-6857

VIDEO

Why do these kids love school? (1990) A film by Dorothy Fadiman. Pyramid Film and Video. This film examines schools across the country that were able to target their specific needs and to create progressive and innovative means for creating effective classrooms. Address: Box 1048 Santa Monica, CA 90406-1048 (213) 828-7577



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