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Service Learning: A Vision for Change and Youth Empowerment

Martha J. R. Johnson
Saint Mary's University of Minnesota

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**Service Learning:
A Vision for Change and Youth Empowerment**

Martha J. R. Johnson

**Masters of Arts in Human Development
Saint Mary's University of Minnesota
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NSLC
c/o ETR Associates
4 Carbonero Way
Scotts Valley, CA 95066

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Abstract

Service Learning: A Vision for Change and Youth Empowerment examines the theoretical and practical framework of service-learning in a curricular setting. Service-learning is both a method and a philosophy of education. This position paper provides teachers and students with the conceptual framework and practical knowledge to implement successful school based service-learning programs that emphasize youth empowerment, democratic process, consensus building, critical reflection, and community collaboration. Key topics included are: definition, philosophy, essential elements, and practical strategies to apply service-learning methodology.

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Position Statement and Introduction

Public schools face many problems: low test scores, violence, apathy, lack of parental involvement, racial tension, and students who are not successful. As teachers we often become so compartmentalized in our approaches to teaching and learning that we fail to connect our subject matter with the real world. Education today has little to do with students' reality.

Service-learning is a way of teaching and learning that helps students connect and apply their learning to real-world issues. It is an important philosophy, instructional strategy, methodology, process and program. There are essential elements and practical applications to consider when designing a service-learning program. Teachers need to become more aware of the philosophy and different approaches to service-learning.

The goal of this position paper is to provide teachers and students with the conceptual framework and practical knowledge to implement successful service-learning action plans in their classrooms and schools. Quality service-learning programs go beyond altruism and charity work--they transform students, schools and the community. Service-learning strives to give students the power and voice to work for social change in their world. Students become active learners and creators of history: "education is about transformation: ourselves, each other, our community and our world" (Unknown).

Statement of Social Responsibility

Service-learning empowers students to work for meaningful social change in their school, community and world: it engages young people in their own learning process, encourages them to really understand and experience the world around them, and then become active members in a democratic society. Service-learning nurtures a life-long commitment to civic participation and social justice. It gives students a chance to connect and apply their learning to real world issues that they care about. There are many benefits for students, schools and the community. It is about courage, compassion, change, challenge, creativity, and connections. Students learn to decipher and understand complex social issues in our society. Service-learning is about teaching for social responsibility. Teachers need to develop a reflective educational practice in a multicultural context that empowers students and gives them the space they need to do effective public problem solving. Margaret Mead sums it up well: "Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world, indeed it is the only thing that ever has."

Student Profiles

Khalilah¹ is often late to school and spends most of her day in the office. She frequently misses class because of disciplinary problems. There is one class, however, where Khalilah shines: Service Learning. She is never late, never gets sent to the office, and participates actively in class discussions. She was elected by her classmates to be the chairperson of an important class committee on racism and discrimination.

Mai Lee is deaf. She is extremely shy and slow to become involved in class discussions. Her native language is Hmong and she can lip-read it fairly well. No one in her home knows sign language or English. She takes special education classes in sign language and English as a Second Language. She has low abilities in school, yet she organized, planned, and team-taught a sign language mini-course to fourth graders at a nearby elementary school.

Jamal is a 13 year old African American. Many of his friends are in gangs or hanging out on the streets. He has trouble sitting still and paying attention in class. He has a temper and can become angry very quickly. Most teachers fear that he will become another "statistic" and drop out. Every Monday afternoon he rocks babies and plays with toddlers at an Early Childhood Education Center. His other teachers have gone by to witness the transformed young man singing lullabies and changing diapers. The teachers are amazed and have an opportunity to see him in a new light. Service-learning can transform teachers as well as students.

María was active on the child labor committee in the Service Learning class. She is a gifted and talented student. Together with her classmates, María gathered an extensive collection of information related to child labor. The committee presented their work at a workshop in November 1997 as an example of how young people can

¹ All student's names are pseudonyms.

define real social problems, identify key stakeholders, make an action plan, carry it out, and evaluate their success. During the workshop María clearly demonstrated her public speaking skills, her ability to think on her feet, and her depth of knowledge about the topic. Students, teachers, senior citizens, and service learning experts asked challenging questions of the committee.

After the service-learning class ended, María applied for a position as a youth organizer at the Resource Center of the Americas. At age 12, she was hired. She never wavered in her commitment to the issue through her work at the Resource Center where she has developed her skills as a leader and youth organizer. She and an eleventh grader at Central High School in Saint Paul have formed the Resource Center's "Youth Organizing Committee on Child Labor and Sweatshops." They have built a network of activists from thirteen middle and high schools in the Twin Cities area. In August of 1998, María attended the International Free the Children Conference in Toronto, Canada where she met youth organizers from around the world. This was an empowering experience for María, to meet young people from other countries who are mobilizing youth to work for change.

Melissa is also a gifted and talented student who took service-learning as an elective class. As part of the twenty hour service requirement for the class, Melissa started volunteering at a local children's hospital where she did puppet shows to help small children feel more prepared for surgery. Melissa continues to volunteer every week at the hospital long after the class ended. In the fall of 1998, María and Melissa helped write a proposal to present Highland Park Junior High's service-learning model at the annual National service-learning Conference. They want to share their experience with others.

Joe is autistic and legally blind. He is also developmentally delayed. He is mainstreamed in many of his classes and has a full-time aide to help him when he

gets off task and serve as his primary note taker. Joe was a passionate member of the School Wide Recycling Committee. Occasionally, he had behavior problems and had trouble sitting still, but this never happened on days his committee went around the school to collect the recycling. Due to his autism, Joe didn't talk a lot in front of the whole class. For a young man of few words, he certainly had a lot to say about the class at the end of the semester:

I learned about recycling and how important it is and how much fun it is and it makes you feel good. I also made new friends. I like Juan. We had fun together. I like to recycle cans, bottles and paper. It is really important to do that so our world is cleaner. I like to help other people and service-learning helped me help other people. I love to recycle. I am good at picking up garbage too. . . I am courteous and respectful. I am a good listener. I am a good role model for other students who aren't respectful. . . I also made good friends with Sergio. I did recycling with him. . . I want to take the class again because I want to do more recycling (J. F., personal communication, June 10, 1998).

At the end of the semester, the Recycling Committee gave Joe a "heart" award made of clay so he could "see" it better than a certificate. They felt he represented the heart of their group and indeed he did.

While there is no single strategy that can transform every student, service-learning has had a profound effect on these students. Service-learning has changed the way the students see their world and their role in it. In some cases it has also changed how the world sees them. Jamal, for example, is now a positive role model in the school.

Young people are concerned about their world and want to have a voice and feel that they have power to make a difference. Service-learning is unique in that it brings together all students who are at all different levels. It starts with the students as

the focal point, considering who they are and what their experiences are. It begins with how they see their world. Service-Learning celebrates each student's unique talents and gifts. Everyone has something valuable to contribute. Through their actions Khalilah, Mai Lee, Jamal, María, Melissa, and Joe define what service-learning is.

What is Service Learning?

The term service-learning was coined in the late 1960s. Since then teachers, community members, and others have been searching for an adequate definition for the term. Service-learning can mean many different things to different people.

According to Giles, Honnet and Migliore (1991):

Service-learning is both a program type and a philosophy of education. As a program type service-learning includes myriad ways that students can perform meaningful service to their communities and to society while engaging in some form of reflection or study that is related to the service. As a philosophy of education, service-learning reflects the belief that education must be linked to social responsibility and that the most effective learning is active and connected to experience in some meaningful way. (7)

There are many kinds of service-learning programs. Historically, community service has been an extra-curricular activity often linked with student council activities and not necessarily connected with learning. However, service-learning covers many areas; there are service-learning classes, after school programs, community projects, community organizations, school-wide themes and community internships. Several districts in the United States require a certain number of service hours as a graduation requirement. Some teachers integrate service projects into their curriculum. All of these are part of the many different types of service-learning programs that exist today. Bhaerman, Cordell and Gomez (1998) believe that service-learning should be viewed

not only as a program, "but rather as an instructional strategy, a philosophy and a process" (p. 1). Service-learning is a way of teaching and learning that can transform a student's experience of school into a life-long commitment to work for change.

A Delphi Study (Shumer, 1993) was conducted to try and reach consensus about a definition for service-learning. While many different views came forward, The Alliance for Service-Learning in Education Reform (ASLER, 1993) promotes an all encompassing definition:

Service-learning is a method by which young people learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully-organized service experiences . . . that meet actual community needs, that are coordinated in collaboration with the school and . . . community, that are integrated into each young person's academic curriculum, that provide the structured time for a young person to think, talk and write [reflect] about what he/she did and saw during the actual service activity, that provide young people with opportunities to use newly acquired academic skills and knowledge in real life situations in their own communities, that enhance what is taught in the school by extending student learning beyond the classroom [and] that help to foster the development of a sense of caring for others. (2)

Benefits of Service-Learning

Service-learning can nurture a life long commitment to civic participation and social justice. Quality service-learning is linked to the curriculum--student centered and student driven. Students have ownership of their own learning. It is applied, hands-on, and experiential learning. This can empower students to work for meaningful social change in their school, community, and world. It engages young people in their own learning process, encourages them to really understand and

experience the world around them, and become active public problem solvers. Service-learning promotes critical thinking skills. Students have an opportunity to connect and apply their learning to real world issues they choose. Learning takes on new meaning because it is authentic. Service-learning helps students develop skills to be active citizens for life: “service learning, in short, provides a holistic, constructivist vision of the learning process and is based on what we know about how students best learn” (Bhaerman et al. 1998, p. 4).

A Philosophy

“I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I act and I understand” (Chinese proverb). This proverb underscores the importance of experiential learning in education. John Dewey used the premise “experience is the best teacher” as a guiding principle of his work in education. Many scholars have written extensively about Dewey's theory of experience and implications for service-learning. Korowski (1991) observes it is “fascinating to realize that nearly 100 years ago, this man had many innovative ideas and theories that still have contemporary value when applied to cooperative education and service-learning” (p. 91). Dewey believed that true learning takes place when things are meaningfully related to one's life. He also viewed education as a continually changing experiment and learning as a continuous life process (Korowski, 1991, p. 92). While service-learning did not exist in Dewey's time as it does today, he would probably argue that service-learning is not just a program, but rather a “philosophy of experiential education which suggests methods and practices that should inform all practices” (Giles, 1991, p. 87). It is time to move beyond the debate as to whether service-learning is a philosophy or a program, and look at the many different philosophies and programs that underlie educational practice as it relates to service-learning.

Kahne and Westheimer (1994) explain "it is helpful to distinguish the moral, political and pedagogical goals that motivate those who support service-learning" (p. 11). They have outlined these goals in the table below:

Table One

Service Learning Goals

| Moral | | Political | Pedagogical |
|--------------|--------|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| CHARITY | Giving | Responsive citizens | Authentic & Active Learning |
| CHANGE | Caring | Critical Democrats | Transformative Pedagogy |

(Kahne and Westheimer, 1994, p. 11)

This table looks at two models of service-learning: charity and change. The moral, political, and pedagogical goals are valuable in both. Kahne and Westheimer argue that change is superior to charity.

The charity approach has become more popular and as a result service-learning has recently become more mainstream. Along with an incredible growth in the number of service-learning programs, there has also been a move towards more charity work and, therefore, away from social change and controversial issues. Kahne and Westheimer (1994) argue that service-learning programs that place "an emphasis on altruism and charity [are] often used to back a conservative political agenda" (p. 18). Service-learning that promotes charity work usually involves short-term direct service that promotes personal growth, develops a sense of altruism, enhances self-esteem, but generally does not have a long-term impacts on resolving issues.

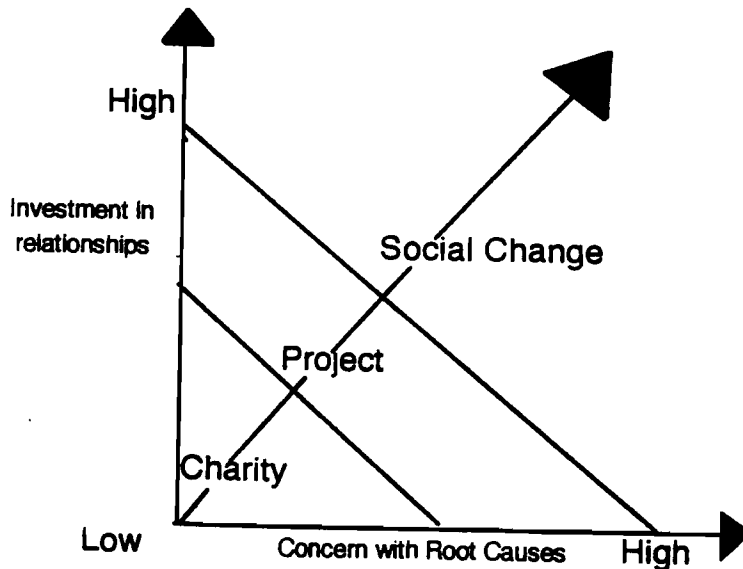
Kahne and Westheimer argue that the goal of charity projects is to give of one's self. The focus is on the server and sometimes has very little connection with those being served. An example of charity work is serving food in a soup kitchen. Students serve food to those in need. Charity oriented programs do not give students a clear understanding of how their work is affecting the communities around them, those who are served, and how the problem was created. Boyte (1991), argues this kind of project does not "teach [students] political skills that are needed to work effectively toward solving society's problems: public judgment, the collaborative exercise of power, conflict resolution, negotiation, bargaining and holding oneself and others accountable" (p. 766). There is little or no relationship between the volunteers and those who are served.

Sometimes charity oriented service work perpetuates an oppressive situation by creating greater dependency. It often does not tackle the root causes of the problem. Critical reflection is often absent or severely lacking in charity oriented service project. Boyte (1991) points out, "volunteers rarely have the wherewithal to reflect on the complex dynamics of race, power and class that are created when middle-class youths go out to "serve" in low-income areas" (p. 766).

Even with its many shortcomings charity oriented service work can be the first step of awareness about the world for many young people. Hausner (1993) affirms this position: "Charitable service work can often be an entry point for public problem solving or policy advocacy" (p. 31). If students give of themselves and are able to see more deeply what the problem is, they may be challenged to integrate the learning toward a solution focus. Charity projects can awaken in students a sense of compassion and, hopefully, a desire to do more.

Some experts argue that there is a continuum of service-learning that ranges from charity to transformation. Keith Morton (1995) claims that many experts believe there is a continuum of service, "that places charity, project and social change models of service at the beginning, middle and end points on a continuum of service, with a side debate over whether or not social change is, in fact, a form of service" (p. 21). The focus of this argument is two fold: as one moves along the continuum from charity work to social change there is increased investment in relationships in addition to an increase in concern with the root causes of the issue. This point is illustrated in Table Two below:

Table Two
Critical Elements in Three Paradigms of Service



(Morton, 1995, p. 21)

Morton (1995) describes project models as focusing "on defining problems and their solutions and implementing well-conceived plans for achieving those solutions" (p. 21). The project approach relies on partnerships with organizations that have access to resources that can make things happen. Building houses for the homeless, establishing tutoring programs, and creating after school programs for students are three examples of projects that Morton (1995) describes. A deeper investment in relationships and a closer examination of root causes takes place in the project model.

Social change or transformation models explore issues of oppression, individual voice, empowerment, and social justice. This model works to remove barriers that keep individuals in the margins of society. This model strives to build mutual respect, understanding, and relationships. Morton (1995) claims social change models focus on the process by: "building relationships among or within stake holder groups, and creating a learning environment that continually peels away the layers of the onion called 'root causes'" (p. 22). Development of relationships and critical analysis of the issues are key elements. **The process is more important than the project.** Morton (1995) writes:

Social transformation models of service focus directly and indirectly on politically empowering the powerless [including youth] . . . A perspective of transformation sees the problems of the poor and oppressed, not as basically functional, but as rooted in and perpetuated by the structural organization of society--as a process whereby they are excluded from economic gain and political power by strategies which preserve the concentration of privilege in society . . . [transformation] demands analysis of both the micro and macro levels. It sees power as the real issue, works for the people's power and joins them in their struggle. (23)

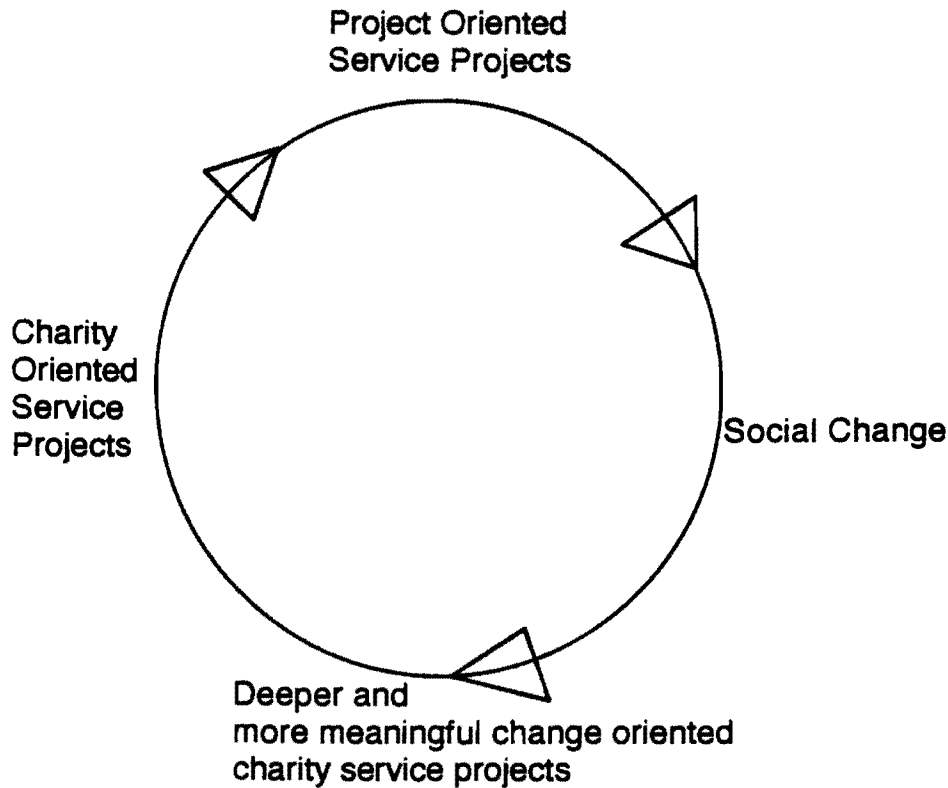
The goal is to empower those who are systematically disenfranchised by bringing people together from various aspects of society to critically analyze social structure. This process brings people into deeper relationships and takes them closer to a clear understanding of root causes of problems and effective strategies for addressing them.

So, is service-learning a program or a philosophy of education? Is there a continuum of service learning experiences from charity to transformation? Some experts argue that instead of a continuum, charity, project, and social change models represent three separate paradigms. Quality service-learning programs can include elements of all the different models--charity, project and social change. These different models can flow into each other, one kind of project can lend energy and enthusiasm to another. Students may begin to make connections about the broader implications of hunger in our society only after serving in a soup kitchen. These steps in service may provide students access into other modes of thought, which in time make social change work possible. There is value in charity work. However, both **those being served** and **those serving** must be part of developing **real** solutions. Doing charity work can cause students to develop a desire to learn and do more that can lead to transformation. Social change work can lead to more meaningful ways of providing charity service work. Taking all three paradigms of service to a deeper level disrupts the notion of a continuum. The three models of service can be seen as part of an inter-connected circle instead of separate points on a line.

Table Three illustrates how the three models of service can be seen as part of a circle:

Table Three

A New Vision for Service-Learning



Martha Johnson, 1999

Discussions about the philosophy of service-learning are interesting and they raise important points to consider. The practitioner must also look carefully at his/her particular setting, the students, administrative support, community resources, funding, level of parental involvement and support, etc. when designing service-learning initiatives. A separate class, a community internship, integration of service into existing classes, a service hour requirement outside of school, service projects by grade level, school wide by theme, district wide, required or elective, credit or no credit, and/or

extra curricular are just some of the possibilities. Whatever kind of program works best, teachers need to be clear on the underlying philosophy of the program. What is the purpose of service-learning? Is it to improve students' self-esteem? Is it to meet curricular objectives or meet real community needs? Can these happen simultaneously? What are the community's needs? According to whom? Is the goal to teach moral education? If so, whose values are we promoting? Are we trying to teach students to be active citizens? Is there a particular political agenda? How does the community benefit? Is the project more important than the process or is it the other way round? Are we going to confront controversial issues and transform education? Are we going to focus on charity work? Is the underlying goal to transform students and build relationships? All of these questions are important to consider to ensure quality service-learning programs.

Essential Elements

In addition to the philosophical frameworks behind service-learning, there are many components that should be considered when designing a successful service-learning program. Rahima Wade (1997), describes the critical elements as: meaningful service, valuable student learning, student empowerment, community collaboration, critical reflection, and enthusiastic celebration of one's efforts (p. xi). The National Service Learning Clearinghouse promotes eleven essential elements of Service Learning Practice (see Appendix A). All quality service-learning programs include: planning, collaboration, action, curriculum integration, critical reflection, evaluation, recognition, and sometimes demonstration.

Role of the Teacher

Service-learning is powerful for both students and teachers. The role of the teacher is critical to implementing successful service-learning experiences that incorporate all essential elements. Teachers need to become more aware of the history and philosophical components of service learning in addition to the essential elements and their practical applications. The teacher becomes a facilitator who gives students moral support, offers help, encouragement, guidance and a framework to maintain focus.

This represents a major shift in the teacher's role. Teachers are no longer "in control" of the classroom. Relinquishing control is critical as the students must have ownership of the process. It is a challenge to know how much assistance and direction to give. James and Pamela Toole (1995) endorse this new role for teachers:

. . . [Students] require a classroom that gives them the intellectual elbow room to pose their own problems, face perplexity, hypothesize, organize and interpret experience, and search for meaning. . . Instructors have to be willing to avoid the tendency to give too much information and to do too much thinking for students. . . teachers are in the role of coaches or facilitators, not "experts," because the focus is on students developing their own ability to reason and make wise decisions. (102-103)

The teacher must be able to let go and allow the students to take over. The projects often take on a life of their own. The teacher's role as a coach is to make sure that every team member knows his/her part and has the skills he/she needs to carry out the projects. Teachers help "build community" within the classroom. They also help students frame the issues, identify stakeholders, do research, plan, make community connections, overcome obstacles, and carry out the service project itself. Students engage in on-going critical reflection and evaluation of both the process and the

project. Students learn about different kinds of committees, develop specific writing skills (resumes, press releases, petitions, writing their own story, etc.), develop time management strategies, as well as, public speaking skills.

Teachers have many roles in service-learning. Specific tasks the teacher must attend to include: arranging transportation, getting permission slips, double checking organizational contacts, and developing parental support and involvement. Teachers engage students in critical analysis of social issues. Students need to see the link between the process and the project. They also need to see the inter-connectedness of their own learning process and global issues. Troppe (1995) effectively describes the role of educators:

Our role as educators is to teach students to become resourceful adults. This means giving them knowledge and skills that will enable them to solve problems, to negotiate the world, to live fully. It means teaching students how to seek knowledge and develop skills, to be actors, not in the sense of pretending or engaging in drama only when others are watching, but metaphorically, to be able to walk onto an empty stage or a stage with other actors and to create something meaningful. Our students want and need to attain and exercise a sense of efficacy and agency in this complex, messy world in which we live. We need to help them struggle to build and maintain community in this democratic society and in a world of global communication and inter-connectedness. (1)

In addition to a major shift in the role of the teacher, we must also create new ways for students to learn. A Service-Learning class is one way to give students the space they need to become effective public problem solvers.

A Model Class

Service-Learning is an elective class at Highland Park Junior High School in Saint Paul, Minnesota (see Course Description in Appendix B). It meets for an hour and a half every other day for a semester. This class offers ALL students a chance to become actively engaged in their own learning and it empowers them to work for change. The students decide what kinds of projects they want to do. The class gives them an opportunity to apply what they are learning in other classes to real problems. Students are encouraged to make connections with the community and seek out community mentors. A twenty hour community service requirement that students complete outside of school gives students an opportunity to apply what they are learning.

The first few weeks of the semester are spent talking about consensus, community, and public problems. After learning more about the class expectations, students dialogue, listen, and actively engage in the process of deciding how they will be graded for the semester. It is always a unique process to see how the students interact, who emerges as leaders and how students reach agreement. The only requirement is they must reach consensus when they determine the grading policy for the class. A lively dialogue about the advantages and disadvantages of "majority rules" versus consensus always takes place. Some students get frustrated and want to quit. This is a teachable moment: it is hard and valuable work. Students practice skills of conflict management, how to really listen, and how to engage in effective dialogue--not just debate.

Everyone brings personal talents and gifts to the class because of his/her uniqueness and personal life experiences. We talk about our passions, dreams and hopes for the future. There is a discussion about how the group can use the gifts of individuals to move forward the goals of the committee. We talk about strategies,

decision making, group skills, and the fact that committee members are accountable to the group. Students learn from first hand experience what happens if someone doesn't do his/her task.

Practical Applications

Building Community

Early in the semester several class periods are spent building community within the class and doing various team and trust activities. Students ponder the question: What are the characteristics of a good team? Games, role plays, brainstorming are effective techniques at this stage to build community, group skills, and team work. This is sometimes difficult for students as they are used to competing for grades, right answers, points, etc. in more traditional classes. In Service-Learning students learn about partnerships, coalitions and collaboration. The goal is to transform a group of young people into a cohesive, productive team.

During the community building process, students also begin to discuss public problems. One class period is spent doing a community needs assessment and brainstorming about public problems that are important to them. For example, Rebecca was very out-going and involved in the community building and team activities. She was unusually quiet, however, the day the class talked about the difference between personal and public problems. The class was engaged in framing the issues to present in a few days at the Issues Convention.² The Issues Convention marks the day students share what they have learned about the public problems and they begin to form committees.

The day of the Issues Convention arrived and a group of students did a thoughtful presentation on hunger and homelessness. Some other students did a

² The Issue Convention is a concept developed by Project Public Achievement at the Humphrey Institute, Minneapolis, MN

presentation about child labor. Rebecca, along with two other students, presented a description of the problem of storm sewer drainage and the need for storm sewer stenciling. She had contacted the County Planning Office about allowing students to paint the storm sewers with stencils. At the end of her presentation she shared that although she was choosing to work with this particular environmental concern, students who were working on the issue of homelessness may want to use her as a resource. She went on to explain that her family had lost their home and had been living in a shelter for the last six months. Her dad had a job and was a hard worker, but it wasn't enough to put food on the table and pay the bills. The class was absolutely silent. She was able to share with the class because she felt a sense of community. Nonetheless, it took great courage. After a few minutes of silence, Jamal raised his hand and suggested that his committee find a way to help her family as part of their project. Rebecca reminded all of us that sometimes public problems can be very personal.

Framing Issues

Building trust and a sense of community in the classroom is essential. Equally important is helping students identify public problems that are important to them. Students can brainstorm about problems in their community, in their school, and in their world. They can conduct a community needs assessment or a community mapping activity showing where there are problems. After students identify the problems they care about, they analyze the issues that are related to the problem. Then, they begin to do research.

One way to analyze the issues is through a guided discussion called "issue, problem, project" (Hildreth, 1998, p. 103). Students identify the issues, list all the different aspects of the problem, and begin to think about possible projects they might

be able to implement. This discussion may take fifteen minutes or an entire class period, depending on how complicated the problem is or how many different aspects there are to the problem. It helps to have a large piece of paper hanging up with the three headings across the top: **Issue-->Problem-->Project**. A student recorder can write all the responses under these three headings. This gives students an opportunity to hypothesize about the issues before they doing research.

A group of students interested in the issue of child labor had a particularly interesting dialogue about the issues, problems and potential projects related to the topic (see Appendix C). This activity can also lead to a valuable discussion called: "What do you need to know about the topic" (see Appendix D). Both of these activities can help students direct and focus their research on pertinent pieces of information they need to learn about the issue.

Another important aspect of "issue framing" is to determine who the key stakeholders are. The students need to identify how big the problem is, who is affected by the problem, how the stakeholders feel about the problem, and what community organizations are doing about the problem. After the students have identified more precisely what the problem is, they can more effectively pinpoint their research.

Research

Once students have framed the issue, they begin to do research. Ideally, they work from a list of research questions they have posed from the issue framing sessions (see Appendix D). Students organize the questions into categories and divide them up. Some students do their research on the telephone, by letter or e-mail, contacting community organizations directly to find out more about the problem. They look for information on the Internet and in the library as well. Students develop skills to use the Internet to do research. The teacher guides them through this process. The information

gathered is shared with all members of the group. Students develop a method for archiving the information. Large milk-crates and file folders can be used for keeping all the information about a particular topic in one place. This information serves as the foundation for the planning stage.

Committees:

During the research stage, committees are formed to carry out the process. Students learn how to run a meeting. They must learn how to set and follow an agenda. It is helpful if each member of a committee has a role such as facilitator, time keeper, recorder, treasurer, and animator. The animator is someone who helps the group stay on task and keeps things moving. Some students may be responsible for the reflection and evaluation that occurs at the end of every meeting. That person may ask of the other members: What worked? What didn't work? What did we do well? How can we do better next time? This information may be used by the members of the group to improve group dynamics at the next meeting. One of the most difficult things for students in this kind of group setting is to stay focused. A timekeeper who can help follow the agenda closely can assist with keeping the group focused. Community mentors or coaches can help the committee process move more smoothly.

Students must learn how to be accountable to each other. The work they do in service-learning is not just to get a grade, but rather to help the public work of the group move forward. If one student does not do his or her part the entire project slows down. Related to accountability is the issue of conflict within the group. Sometimes a person feels left out, he or she doesn't do his or her part, he or she controls the group too much or does not listen to what others say. Developing group skills and learning about conflict resolution is critical to successful public problem solving.

Planning

Many times students want to start a project without really understanding the problem. A primary task for teachers is to listen to students, help them define the problem, and then identify a project. Teachers help students realize the importance of planning. It is important to give students a framework or structure to help them get started. The "Six Step Process to Effective Public Problem Solving" (see Appendix E) helps students visualize the steps they will be taking. They define the problem, conduct research, identify stakeholders, make community connections, brainstorm projects, design an action plan, overcome obstacles, plan, carry out the action plan, and evaluate and reflect on both the process and the project.

At Highland Junior High, we talk about four different kinds of projects: direct service, informational projects, public policy, and education and training.³ Table Four includes examples of the four different kinds of projects.

Table Four

Examples of Four Kinds of Projects

| | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| <p>Direct Service:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Serving food at a soup kitchen. •Picking up litter at a park. •Storm sewer stenciling. •Collecting food for a food shelf. | <p>Informational Projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Making & distributing a flyer to put on doors about water run off & storm sewers. •Making & distributing a list of products that are known to be made with child labor. | <p>Education and Training:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Teaching others about the problem of child labor. •Training others about ways to lobby the school board about the "Sweat Free Schools Campaign." | <p>Public policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Presenting a proposal to the school board about the "Sweat Free Schools Campaign." |
|---|---|--|--|

Direct service relates mostly to charity projects. Education and training and informational projects can be charity oriented, project oriented or transformational, depending on the topic and goals. Public policy is usually directly linked to some kind

³ This concept comes from Sue Allen, Positive Youth Development of Wisconsin

of social change.

In addition to planning for the actual project, each team member must know what is expected of them. They may need some specific training. If they are going to work on an intergenerational project, for example, students learn about issues facing the elderly. Through planned training activities students look at their own personal bias about aging as well society's stereotypes. Students also develop specific skills for a project. Depending on the scope of their project, they may need to learn how to care for injured wildlife, conduct water quality testing, or lobby state legislators. Students practice public speaking, recruiting other students, organizing meetings, and analyzing problems. It is the teacher's job to find creative ways to give students these skills.

Community Connections

The teacher offers ideas to enhance community connections and/or to establish community mentors. At the junior high level, it is helpful if students build a relationship with a community mentor who meets with them on a weekly or biweekly basis. This person may be a college student, a retired senior citizen, or a person from a particular community organization. This person serves as a mentor or coach and needs some training and support to be effective. Project Public Achievement of the Center for Democracy and Citizenship in Minneapolis offers coaches training workshops four times a year.

The teacher also helps students locate other resources they need to be successful. Students learn how to network and how to collaborate with other people (kids, community members, individuals, principals, etc.). They learn about building partnerships, consensus and establishing community liaisons. Sometimes there is a community organization that is already doing what the students had in mind. Maybe

they can link up, share the work load, and bring new energy and ideas to the table. Students learn how to engage in real dialogue and become active listeners. They learn to look for commonalities and build consensus. Through the process of building community connections, students gain valuable communication and organization skills. They have to use the telephone, explain what they are doing, make arrangements, set dates and times to meet, etc. They develop telephone skills as well as public speaking skills.

Another way to make community connections is through the media. Students sometimes need to get their message out to a larger audience. The media is one way to do this. Students practice their writing skills by writing press releases and their communication skills by calling the press. For instance, Saint Paul Public Schools recently released a document my students use when working with the media. Sometimes students recruit community mentors or volunteers for other projects through an article in the local paper. Another way to make a community connection and get the students' message out to a larger audience is through the Internet. Students can create a Web page about their topic.

Obstacles

There are many obstacles that committees may face when they engage in public problem solving. There may be conflict within the group. Group skills and conflict resolution skills need to be taught. Other obstacles include: the scope of the project, students not being accountable to each other, some members unable to stay focused, not enough time, not enough money, and not enough support. Occasionally, the principal says no to a particular activity. When this happens, students feel they don't have the power to complete the project. All of these obstacles can lead to frustration.

Students learn that frustration is a normal part of the process. Then they can confront the obstacles directly and develop strategies to overcome them. This is a valuable lesson students can take with them and apply it to all other areas of their lives. Sometimes students feel like they have not reached their goals. This is part of the process. The teacher helps the students focus the project so that it is something they can accomplish in a reasonable amount of time so students can be successful. Funding to carry out a particular project can be a huge obstacle. Students may need to learn how to ask for money. Sometimes they learn how to be grant writers. They often learn how to write and follow a budget.

The teacher reviews all action plans before they are implemented. Most of the time, the action plans are approved by the principal too. The teacher helps students redesign proposals when the principal does not approve the activity. This has happened at Highland on a few occasions and valuable lessons were learned. One group of students wanted to do an informational project about Highland's "Safe Staff ~ Out for Equity Program" that promotes safe schools for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered students, staff, and families of our school community. The students designed a mural they wanted to paint on a wall of the school for all to see. They took their proposal to the principal and he said, "Absolutely no mural." The students came back to the class very disappointed.

After talking about it, I realized they had neglected to ask him why he said no. They assumed that he said no because it was too controversial. I encouraged them to go back and ask him why he said no, so they could see if they could reach a compromise. When they spoke with him, he explained that he thought the project was a wonderful idea, but that he objected to a mural because of its permanency. He argued that terms that are appropriate today for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people might be outdated in a few years and the mural would still be

on the wall. The students came back to class full of enthusiasm and ready to brainstorm new ideas. How could they get their message across without making a mural? They asked questions and really listened for the answers. This group of students made a large quilt that is mobile and hangs in different locations around the school.

When facing the many obstacles that arise when students are engaged in public problem solving, the issue of power or feeling powerless comes up again and again. Hildreth (1998) explains, that "understanding power, both conceptually and practically, is a crucial element in citizen education and public work" (p. 119). Power is about the ability to influence other people, institutions or processes. Most students think that some people have power and others do not. When analyzing power, students begin to realize that it must be viewed as a "relation that is dynamic, interactive and multidirectional" (Hildreth, 1998, p. 120). Students begin to see power less in terms of who has it and who does not, and more in terms of how people can work together for change. Hildreth (1998) affirms this view when he writes:

What is important in the practice of public work is organizing people and resources to change the relations of power that constitute a particular problem. If one learns to think carefully and strategically about the relationships one needs to build power, as well as, the interactive nature of power, the world begins to look far different. (120)

Students analyze their issue in terms of the different stakeholders and what are the power structures that exist between those stakeholders. Students learn how to access power. They learn about power in numbers. Educators help students analyze the power relationships that exist and the different perspectives that exist when considering public problems. Dingerson and Hay (1998) explain to students that "the key to making substantive change is getting power. And the keys to getting power are

getting informed, getting organized, getting allies, getting resources, and getting smart about how to shift your relationship with decision makers" (Dingerson and Hay Co/Motion Manual, Power and Change, 1998, p. 9).

Carry out the plan

Once students have decided on an action they recruit others to join with them. They need to be clear about what they are going to do and how others can help. Everyone should agree about the goals of the action. Everyone must know what their roles are. They present their action plan to the class or a community group and ask for suggestions. All participants have an opportunity to plan and prepare for the action. This includes thinking about what other things might happen. They also need to consider if additional "props" (signs, posters, petitions, role-plays, etc.) might be an important part of the action. These things should be decided and practiced before the action itself. Dingerson and Hay (1998) describe the role of a "prep session" before the action:

No matter how much time you have spent getting ready for an action, it's important to have a very short "prep session" immediately before it. Gather the participants at a site where you can talk for a few minutes (a classroom or parking lot or someone's home). Review the plans and make sure all participants are clear about their roles. Is the spokesperson equipped with the correct information? Do you have the props you need? Even if you have gone over this at an earlier meeting, this prep session is an important chance for everyone to know they are ready. (107)

The teacher makes sure that all the permission slips have been turned in, the transportation has been arranged, there is adequate adult supervision and that everyone knows what they are going to do.

Evaluate and reflect on the process and the project

Evaluation and reflection are essential elements of a quality service-learning program. James and Pamela Toole see reflection as the tool for turning service experiences into learning experiences. The Alliance for Service Learning in Education Reform (ASLER, 1993) defines reflection as “the process of looking back on the implications of actions taken, both good and bad, determining what has been gained, lost or achieved, and connecting these conclusions to future actions and larger societal contexts” (p. 71-72). Reflection can take place as part of a discussion. It should happen before, during, and after the service activity. Students can write and read as part of the reflection process. Some students may reflect on their service experience through the arts: poetry, dance, videos, sculptures, posters, photography, role plays, or cartooning.

The teacher sets up reflection activities, gives prompts for journal entries, and sets guidelines for debriefing sessions. Through reflection activities, the teacher helps students make the connection between the curriculum and the service projects. They reflect on both the process and the project. As part of the evaluation, students make a plan to carry on the work in the future. Students organize a report of all the things they accomplished, what research they gathered, what community connections they made, what action plan they completed and how successful they were. They also make recommendations for a future group of students that might be interested in the same issue. Students learn how to record their own history. Students create individual and or group portfolios that document their work. Students learn about self assessment, as well as, peer assessment.

Celebration and Recognition

In addition to evaluation and reflection, students need to be recognized for their work. They also enthusiastically celebrate their accomplishments. My students complete their final committee reports and do the last big reflection activity as a take-home assignment. Students plan a wonderful day of celebration for the last day of the semester which is traditionally set aside for final exams. Everyone receives an award (students nominate other students or themselves). All community partners, mentors, parents, and coaches are invited. They almost always receive awards as well. The room is decorated, music is played, speeches are given, awards are given out, food disappears, presentations are made to the principal and others. Games are played, there is much applause, and usually a few tears. Pictures are taken and the class is over, but the impact the class has on students continues. Khalilah states in her final reflection paper:

Service Learning is a totally different kind of class. I have never had a class like it before. It is about respect and learning how to work with each other to solve problems we care about. I learned about conflict resolution and how to listen to others. I learned about committees and how to be a leader. I learned how to deal with frustration and move forward. I see myself differently now. Before, people thought I was part of the problem. Now, I know I am part of the solution. I want to make a difference and teach people about racism and I will do it. The things I learned in this class I will take with me always. I am committed to doing the best I can to make the world a better place for everyone. I now have much more hope for the future. (M. H., Final Reflection Paper, June 1998).

Conclusion

After the class is over many students continue to be involved with their topic, their volunteer work or something related. Many students join Fresh Force, an extra-curricular service-learning program in St. Paul Schools. Students develop lasting friendships that began in Service-Learning class.

There still needs to be a better way for students to stay connected to the project they started and to the community they have created. The service-learning teacher needs to continue to support the students and their passions. Resources and support must be available to the students. The community they worked so hard to create needs to extend beyond the duration of the class. According to Ayers, Hunt and Quinn (1998), John Dewey describes the overriding goal of education is "to make schools a genuine form of active community life, instead of a place set apart to learn lessons" (p. 11).

The school district must articulate some kind of program continuity to deepen the service-learning paradigm for all involved. Students need to be part of the decision making process at the district level. Previous service-learning students could teach the process and core concepts at elementary schools. Young people are positive resources. They develop leadership skills. They use their creative talents, dreams, visions, and energy. The paradigm deepens.

School districts must support service-learning with funding for resources, transportation, teacher collaboration, on-going staff development, and administrative support. Service-learning is a lot of work for teachers. They must begin to see it as an essential part of their teaching practice, not "just another thing we have to do." On-going teacher training for service-learning is essential. School districts must allocate resources and make teacher training available.

Just like service-learning teachers, community organizations and community mentors need additional training and support. It takes time and effort to build these

valuable partnerships. They need to envision new models to be true partners with young people. Educators need to recruit and train community organizers to be partners and collaborators in this process.

Service-learning as a philosophy and as a program is in the process of moving in from the margins. To sustain growth, continuity, and quality researchers must begin to analyze the long term impact of service-learning on students and the communities they serve. For service-learning to be a driving force in educational reform in the next century, there needs to be more focus on assessment and evaluation. We need to assess and evaluate the service we are providing, how the community benefits, how students are engaged, and what they are learning. How does service-learning contribute to school reform and improve school climate? How well are students able to take the process they have learned and apply it to other areas of their lives? How do they continue to move forward and make a difference in their world?

Service-learning is a valuable elective class that develops life long skills for young people to become actively engaged in the world around them by participating in public problem solving. Tammy McKenna affirms this position, “[this kind of teaching is about] creating the capacity for young people to learn to solve large social problems” (personal conversation, Tammy McKenna, March 29, 1999). The practical applications presented in this paper are part of the elective class at Highland Park Junior High. They can be adapted to fit into other service-learning models as well, “Service-learning is valuable and a precursor to an informed, engaged and compassionate society” (personal conversation, Tammy McKenna March 29, 1999).

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ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE SERVICE-LEARNING PRACTICE

CLUSTER I: LEARNING

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT 1: Effective service-learning establishes clear educational goals that require the application of concepts, content and skills from the academic disciplines and involves students in the construction of their own knowledge.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT 2: In effective service-learning, students are engaged in tasks that challenge and stretch them cognitively and developmentally.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT 3: In effective service-learning, assessment is used as a way to enhance student learning as well as to document and evaluate how well students have met content and skills standards.

CLUSTER II: SERVICE

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT 4: Students are engaged in service tasks that have clear goals, meet genuine needs in the school or community and have significant consequences for themselves and others.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT 5: Effective service-learning employs formative and summative evaluation in a systematic evaluation of the service effort and its outcomes.

CLUSTER III:

CRITICAL COMPONENTS THAT SUPPORT LEARNING & SERVICE

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT 6: Effective service-learning seeks to maximize student voice in selecting, designing, implementing and evaluating the service project.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT 7: Effective service-learning values diversity through its participants, its practice and its outcomes.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT 8: Effective service-learning promotes communication and interaction with the community and encourages partnerships and collaboration.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT 9: Students are prepared for all aspects of their service work including a clear understanding of task and role, the skills and information required by the task, awareness of safety precautions, as well as knowledge about and sensitivity to the people with whom they will be working.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT 10: Student reflection takes place before, during and after service, uses multiple methods that encourage critical thinking, and is a central force in the design and fulfillment of curricular objectives.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT 11: Multiple methods are designed to acknowledge, celebrate and further validate students' service work.

Highland Park Junior High Service Learning Course Description

HIGHLAND PARK JUNIOR HIGH

Course Description & Calendar

Course: Service Learning

#1482

Teacher: Martha Johnson

Semester: 2 **School Yr:** 1997-98

General Goals/Course Content: Service learning stresses the development of the student as a whole person and encourages responsible citizenship in the world outside the classroom. Students learn and develop through active participation in organized service experiences that meet actual community needs. Activities may be integrated into content area classes and tie into existing networks of service organizations worldwide. Celebration of personal talent and the opportunity to work as a team on a committee to do public problem solving is the heart of this class. We will have fun and feel successful in our efforts. This course will challenge all of us to be life-long learners, actively involved and concerned with the world around us.

Specific Objectives:

Each student will:

- identify needs and service opportunities which contribute to quality of life in the community.
- use talents developed in school and elsewhere to participate in service projects inside and outside of school which are intergenerational, multicultural, disability and gender-fair.
- learn about the process of community service and its value.
- communicate with service agencies by calling, writing and interviewing.
- reflect on personal decisions and experiences of community involvement.
- actively participate in discussions, project talks, committee work, reflection papers and activities and class evaluations.
- develop leadership qualities, problem solving and communication skills.
- evaluate the success of both individual and group projects.
- reflect in meaningful ways on their own learning process in service learning.

Books, Materials:

Always bring your creative talents, a notebook, folder and a pen or pencil to class.

Also bring plenty of imagination, vision and energy for action and reflection!

Expectations, Homework Frequency, Grading Policy:

Each student will be expected to :

- be on time for every class and every service experience with necessary materials.
- participate actively and respectfully in all classroom committees, discussions, decisions and experiences such as simulations, guest speakers, skits, mock interviews, and so on.
- keep a personal "log" (journal) of experiences, ideas and reflections.
- write two reflection papers and give two project talks to share experiences with the class.
- participate in 20 hours (minimum) of service learning experiences throughout the semester.
- provide written statements from service project supervisors to document the 20 hours of required service.
- help develop a grading policy relevant to the service learning class.

Important Dates:

February 16 President's Day: No school!

May 8: Human Rights Fair

March 23-27 Spring Break: No School!

May 26 Memorial Day: No School!

April 14 and 23 Evening Conferences

June 4 & 5 Final Exams

April 19-22 National Service Learning Conference

June 5: Last Day of School!

| | | |
|--|----------|--|
| Curriculum Calendar & Time line | June | Year end survey --- Final Exams June 4 & 5 Last day of school: June 5! |
| | May | Human Rights Fair, final reports due, reflection assignments, celebration and recognition events |
| | April | Service Projects and Committee Work |
| | March | Option One: service projects Option Two: Public Problem solving in committees |
| | February | Examples of public problems, introductions to service project ideas and agencies, research |

Issue

----->

Problem

----->

Project*

-Child labor

-Kids aren't going to school

- not enough teachers
- not enough schools, books, etc.
- schools are too expensive (not free)
- kids must work instead of going to school so they can eat

-Raise money to help build a school

-Work for full adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

-Companies hire kids to work

-Kids are paid unfairly, working long hours in unsafe & dangerous conditions

-Boycott companies that use child labor, write to CEOs, organize a petition drive,

-Globalization of the economy

-Companies move to countries where labor is cheap, if unions are organized they close up shop and go someplace else

-Contact human rights organizations in other countries

-High adult unemployment rate

-Kids have to work so their families can eat

-Lobby congress to pass a law so our country no longer buys products that are made with child labor

-Companies want to make a profit

-People want to buy cheap products which require cheap labor to keep costs down

-Teach others about the problems and work with them to do things

-Companies spend a lot of \$ on ads

-Ads make people want to buy more

- Consumerism
- Kids make more products
- They spend more money on ads, than labor

-Support unions and living wages of adults so kids don't have to work and can go to school

-Wealth is distributed unequally in society.

-A few people have a lot of \$, while most have very little

-Convince companies that it is important to be socially responsible.

-Convince companies to pay decent wages and build schools for kids

-Produce a play to teach others about child labor

*Based on notes taken during an issue framing discussion in Service Learning class at Highland Park Jr. High, (1998, February).

*Based on Issue-framing techniques described in: Hildreth, R. (1998). Building worlds, transforming lives, making history: A guide to public achievement. Minneapolis, MN: Center for Democracy and Citizenship.

"Issue----->Problem----->Project"

Appendix D

What do we need to learn about child labor?*

- How many people are affected by child labor? What countries are most effected?
- What kinds of jobs do most children do? How dangerous are they?
- What hours do they work? How much do they get paid? What do their parents do?
- What kind of hope is there for their future? What will they do?
- What will their children do? Is it a cycle that has been going on for generations?
- What is their life expectancy?
- What is the education system like in these countries?
- What is the adult unemployment rate?
- What are the labor laws concerning children? Are the laws enforced?
- Are there international laws that protect children? What about the United Nations?
- Are there human rights organizations in these countries? What are they doing?
- Can we help these human rights organizations? How? What do they need from us?
How can we find this out? What are their biggest obstacles?
- What is the economy like?
- Is there a minimum wage? Is it enforced?
- How desperate is the government to attract business? Why?
- Are they so desperate they are willing to allow companies to use unfair labor practices? Why? What will be the long term impact?
- Are labor unions allowed? How does the existence of unions impact child labor?
- What is a labor union and how do they work?
- What boycotts are taking place right now? How effective are they?
- Do boycotts really help the children?
- Do boycotts hurt because people stop buying the products they make?
- What is free flow capitol? How does free flow capitol effect child labor?
- Is child labor (although we know it is wrong) better than starving to death?
- What is wrong with society that we allow this [child labor] to continue?
- What does globalization of the economy have to do with child labor?
- How can young people have a voice for young people who have no voice?
- Who are all the stake holders regarding this issue?
- What are the power relationships between them?
- What does poverty have to do with child labor? Why is there poverty in the world?
- How many people can the world sustain?
- How can resources be distributed more fairly around the world, so all children can go to school?
- What does the distribution of wealth have to do with child labor?
- How can we work to change this?
- How can we teach other people about this problem and what is it that we want to ask them to do about it? What methods can we use?

*Based on notes taken during an issue framing discussion in service learning class at Highland Park Junior High in St. Paul, (1998, February).

Appendix E

Six Step Process to Effective Public Problem Solving

1. **Define the problem.** Get the facts. Be specific. Do research. Make phone calls. Visit organizations. Use the internet. Find out as much as you can. Who is affected by the problem? How many people are affected? What do those affected have to say about the problem? Are they being heard? Why or why not? What's already being done about the problem? Who's doing something? What are they doing? How successful are they? How is their work progressing? Is there someone from that organization who'd be interested in working with your group as a community mentor? What work still needs to be done? What are some other approaches to this problem that have not been tried? Redefine the problem as needed.

2. **Brainstorm** your own group's possible projects/solutions. Come up with as many different possibilities as you can. You may want to try and think of different KINDS of projects (public policy, educational, informational and direct action). Sometimes thinking of projects in these four categories, helps maintain focus on what aspect of the problem really matters to you.

3. Narrow the list down to something workable. **Design an action plan.** What are the obstacles that may prevent you from carrying out the project? List them and then come up with strategies for overcoming these obstacles. Present the action plan to your coach, teacher, principal (whoever needs to know what's happening with your project) and ask for feedback! Create a calendar of specific tasks (who's going to do what and when).

4. **Carry out the action plan!** Re-evaluate, reconnect and redesign as needed.

5. **Evaluate** the project. **Evaluate** the process. **Reflect** on your own learning. Organize a **final summary report** for a new group to be able to use your work in the future. **Share** about both the process and the project with interested parties (social studies classes, community organizations, etc.) Evaluate every committee meeting. What worked? What did we accomplish? What could we do differently next time to make things run more smoothly?

6. **Celebrate** your accomplishments!