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## The Spirit of Volunteerism and Volunteerism in American Schools

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The Spirit of Volunteerism and Volunteerism in American Schools:  
A Paper Presented at the Washington State University College of Education--  
Nishinomiya, JAPAN, School District Seminar

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10 November 1997

<p><i>Note to Translator:</i> Please feel free to email me if you have difficulties in translation...so that I can revise appropriately: <a href="mailto:maring@wsu.edu">maring@wsu.edu</a> .</p>
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Volunteerism and Service to Others in American Culture and Society.

In American culture historically and at present, there is a strong tension between "rugged individualism" and commitment to community-mindedness. University of California professor of sociology Robert Bellah et al. (1985) have analyzed this tension in its roots and ramifications from political, literary, philosophical, theological, psychological, and sociological perspectives in their seminal work Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life. Building upon the findings and perspectives they wrote about in Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life, Bellah et al. (1991) proposed in their sequel entitled The Good Society what they felt were necessary changes and reforms in the major institutions of American life and culture . . . so that Americans could make better progress in all sectors of society, including schooling at both pre-college and at postsecondary levels. Professor Bellah and his colleagues concluded and recommended that Americans both out of school and in school should commit themselves to a stronger vision of community-mindedness and to a

greater commitment to volunteerism. Some critics of American culture have more recently decried the systematic loss, over the last two or three decades, of what is termed Social Capital in America [i.e., civic involvement and concern]. Robert D. Putnam (1995) has noted trends which have contributed to the decline and has expounded upon ideas, actions, and further research that may counter this trend.

In American education, one of the major vehicles for helping to bring about a greater spirit of volunteerism is the educational innovation known as service learning. In this paper, having noted the preceding more general sociological framework, next will be presented definitions and benefits of service learning. Then, examples of service learning integrations will be described as they occurred in a number of schools in the eastern United States and in a school designed for Native American students in the American southwest. The paper next offers a sample list of service learning activities preservice teachers in Professor Maring's courses at Washington State University have proposed for inclusion within units of study [along with reading and writing across the curriculum strategies] and a sample listing of actual service learning experiences some of his preservice students have actually engaged in during his courses. A goal of these Washington State University courses is that these teachers will be able to integrate similar or related service learning activities into their teaching once they become full time teachers. The paper draws to a close by listing two URL's on the World Wide Web which contain further examples of service learning integrations in American k-12 and higher education programs.

Defining "service learning." Service learning, with its intellectual roots in experiential-active learning theories for teaching and learning, has in recent years become a respected and practiced educational approach in the

United States. It can be defined as a teaching/learning method which connects meaningful community and/or in-school experiences with:

- a. academic learning (including literacy development)
- b. personal growth, and
- c. development of civic responsibility. (Maring, 1993)

McPherson (1995) has explained "service-learning" in greater detail.

She noted that it . . .

. . . is a concept developed during the early 1970's. It focuses on recognizing and promoting the value of serving one's community and on implementing an instructional technique which enables students to learn through service experiences. Service-learning has proven more effective and long-lasting as an educational method than purely classroom instruction. Service-learning encourages students to apply what they are learning while helping others. Through service experiences:

- Basic learning is integrated with the needs of society.
- Students develop a zest for lifelong learning that characterizes active and responsible citizenship.
- Students make connection with the world in which they live and learn how to learn from experience.
- Students see that they are not only autonomous individuals but also members of a larger community to which they are accountable.

**Benefits of Service Learning.** McPherson (1995) explained that service learning has many benefits, including:

- \* Fostering a sense of personal meaning.
- \* Reaching "at-risk" youth.
- \* Fostering requisites for adult success.

- \* Increasing altruism.
- \* Reducing feelings of isolation and "unconnectedness."
- \* Expanding instructional effectiveness.
- \* Developing good citizens.
- \* Providing valuable services to the community.

**Specific Examples of Service Learning in Selected American Schools.**

The June 1991 issue of the Phi Delta Kappan educational journal was a themed issue devoted to service learning. The following examples were taken from that issue ----

In a 5th grade at Freeman Elementary School in the Springfield, Massachusetts. School District [195 State St., Springfield, MA. 01103]:

**\*\*\*\*\*Science Curriculum** (soil erosion, animal habitats, plant life). **Content Area Literacy Dimension:** Reading (books, stories), researching plant life, vegetation of area, necessary animal habitat. **Service Learning Activities:** Students cleared trails, planted shrubs and bushes, and helped develop a sledding area for the community to use. Environmental Center of Springfield co-coordinated.

**\*\*\*\*\*Social Studies, Language Arts, Home and Family Living** (integrated) **Curriculum. Content Area Literacy Dimension:** Writing and reading letters. **Service Learning Activities:** Students communicated each month with their "adopted" resident of a local nursing home, by sending messages, pictures and sometimes initiating special class projects directly related to their elderly friend, i.e. surprised resident on 88th birthday with "butterfly" cake that they had baked as a class project . . . because the resident was a native of Scotland, students studied geography and shared what they had learned with her. A **Community Service Learning** representative coordinated with staff members of the **Springfield School Volunteers** to set up a 'phone pal' network in

which residents called their 'student pals' each day to chat and hear about the day's events.

In a fourth grade classroom at Alice B. Beal School in the Springfield, MA, School District, as part of their **content literacy assignments**, children read newspapers and encyclopedias, wrote letters to Haiti, and wrote about graphs of data. **Service Learning Activity:** Teachers adopted the theme "Helping the Hungry and the Home" . . . students collected 140 lbs. of sneakers for children in Haiti . . . as sneakers piled up children weighed and graphed progress on a wall chart . . . students viewed slides of Haiti in geography class (students saw children who were always barefoot and began to understand poverty) . . . a local resident delivered the sneakers to an orphanage.

In a seventh grade at Chestnut Street Middle School in the Springfield, MA., School District, students completed a **service learning activity** involving a school-wide Brothers/Sisters program. Older students checked younger ones' homework, visited them at home, met them before and after school to work together on projects, shared quiet moments with them in school, and showed that they care about them. Students in the program attended a Saturday seminar, explored bias, what a friend is, discussed peer pressure, and exchanged ideas of helping another student.

Another service learning activity in the same school involved students researching and producing a video called "Portrait of a Neighborhood," an exploration of the neighborhood's heritage. The program has been shown on the local cable station and continues to be used by students and teachers as an orientation for new students.

At Lincoln [elementary] School in the Springfield, MA, School District, fourth grade students studied **Social Studies** and used **content literacy**

strategies to write stories about citizenship and to display them on "Wall of Fame." They also read about "good citizens." **Service Learning Activity:** the school adopted "citizenship" as service theme. The children, after being exposed to diverse models of good citizenship from history, literature and contemporary society, reached out to the community by holding a "good citizen" contest (nominated parents, grandparents, foster parents, neighbors, social workers, teachers, older brothers and sisters, baby-sitters, camp counselors). The children then reflected on these activities. Another **Service Learning Activity** at the same school occurred when the entire neighborhood community came together for "Good Citizens on Parade." Children wore school color/emblem T-shirts, and balloons and banners. The fourth grade band led a drill team to a park where each "good citizen" was honored by the mayor and other dignitaries. The community responded by treating the children to a concert and offered them ice cream sundaes and snacks donated by a local citizens group.

#### Examples With Native American Students

In America, there are many diverse cultures. Native American high school students engaged in various content, content literacy, and service learning activities at Cherokee Nation Alternative High School [700 S. Boardman, Gallup, New Mexico 87301]. The youngsters' content area literacy activities involved journal writing, writing letters, and reading. **Service Learning Activity:** Three boys and three girls visited an elderly woman of mixed blood who lived alone. The boys split and stacked firewood; the girls talked with her and formed a friendship.

In a mathematics class at the same high school, the students engaged in content area literacy activities by writing in their journals about their activity, reactions, and reflections...they predicted, estimating quantities

needed . . . and read about brick making and the history of brick making.

**Service Learning Activity:** the students assisted in rebuilding a 250-year-old adobe church . . . made bricks by hand, mixing straw and mud, pouring mixture into molds, and cleaning molds. They transported about 3,000 dry bricks to the church site.

In their English class, students completed **Content Area Literacy Activities** by reading and writing song lyrics . . . by researching the history of songs . . . by reading about child developmental psychology . . . and by reading about the government of their town. **Service Learning Activity:** students painted administrative offices of Jemez Pueblo Services complex, including governor's office. One group of students taught songs and games to children in a summer lunch program, while the larger group painted.

In their Science class, students completed **Content Area Literacy Strategies** by read about erosion and current efforts to stop it...by read about planning, park service, recreation management as an occupations. Their **Service Learning Activity** related to science curriculum involved their working for the U.S. National Park Service at El Morro National Monument [park]. They worked to contain erosion on trails, repaired existing trails, and built new ones, and cleaned and uprooted weeds at the historical Anasazi Ruins.

#### **Integrating Service Learning Into Teachers' Lesson Plans and Units.**

During the years 1992--1995 and 1993--1995, Professor Maring (1993, forthcoming 1997) received concurrent funding [partnership grants] from the Washington State University Higher Education Coordinating Board/HECB and the Corporation for National Service/CNS to revise his content area literacy courses for preservice and inservice teachers so that his college students might leave these courses having learned about service learning and

know how to interconnect it to the content and content literacy skills they would be expected to teach to future pupils. The following is a sample of service learning activities and projects designed by Professor Maring's college students before the Spring 1996 semester:

- a community culture fair for Bilingual/English As A Second Language Education
- tutoring lower grade students in regards to prejudice and discrimination
- creation of a nutrition-guide pamphlet
- writing an earthquake survival kit
- writing maps and travel guides for the local community
- designing and planting a community vegetable garden
- charity fun-run for the Special Olympics
- adopt a highway
- nutrient recycling program
- visiting Veterans Hospital
- creating an "anti-shoplifting" flyer
- desktop publishing a multicultural handbook
- creating a booth for a home improvement show
- creating and displaying community billboards in public buildings
- energy conservation and money management for the elderly
- graffiti cleanup
- adopt a child program
- volunteering at an AIDS hospice
- retirement home partnerships
- writing a "multicultural math" handbook for next year's students
- adopt a family
- making a time capsule for the community

Service Learning Practicum Experiences by WSU Preservice Teachers.

Before the Spring 1996 semester at Washington State University, Professor Maring's college students also engaged in the following actual service learning activities since they wanted to explore and evaluate whether such activities would hold promise as useful integrations once they became teachers. The following is a sample listing of the practicum projects the college students engaged in:

- *Habitat for Humanity*
- *A Handicapped Rodeo Service Project*
- *WORLD WIDE WEB*
- *YMCA Friends to Seniors Service Project*
- *Community Action Center*
- *Literacy Corps*
- *Palouse Clearwater Institute /PCI Environmental Service Projects*
- *Food Bank*
- *Making Presentations about "Motivation" to Native American Youth*
- *Animal Shelter Service Project*

- *Serving in a Shelter for Severely Retarded Persons*
- *Tutoring at a Private School*
- *Convalescent Center Service Projects*
- *Apartments for the Elderly Service Projects*
- *Teaching Content Literacy and Service Learning at a Middle School and at an Alternative High School*
- *Halloween Party Service Project for Community Youth*
- *Tutoring in ESL/GED Program*
- *Offering a Creative Dramatics Program at an Alternative High School*
- *ESL Tutoring in Mathematics*
- *Tutoring a Remedial Reader*
- *Volunteering in a People-Pet Partnership Program*
- *Tutoring in An Alternative High School --Including "The Great .22 Rifle Caper"*

- *Volunteering to Lead a "Horse Showing" Project*
- *Volunteering for Environmental Clean-up Projects*
- *YMCA "Little Buddies" Program*
- *Service Learning as a World Wide Web "Tech Expert"*
- *Teaching College Peers----HIV/AIDS Residence Hall Short Course*

**Browsing Service Learning Ideas for Teaching on the World Wide**

**Web.** Beginning with the Spring 1996 semester, students in Professor Maring's courses have placed their ideas related to service learning on the **World Wide Web** in the form of "Service Learning Reflective Essays" or in the form of Service Learning integrations within units of study they construct related to their teaching specializations [e.g., Social Studies, Science, Foreign Language, Home Economics, English, Mathematics] as preservice or inservice teachers.

This information and teaching ideas can be read [and comments returned] by consulting the following URL:

**<http://www.educ.wsu.edu/tl/450>**

This website has email "comments or questions" links so that our "website visitors" can get to know what members of the learning communities in Professor Maring's courses think and propose and so that browsers can direct questions via email to the Professor and the college

students who constructed this website which contains so many service learning and content area literacy ideas for teaching and learning.

Teachers and students who are at preservice or inservice levels can also find service learning ideas on the World Wide Web at ----

**<http://www.nicsl.coled.umn.edu>**

### References

NOTE: The following references need not be read/ translated.

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Maring, Gerald H. " Adding Service Learning to the Core Program At Washington State University." In Anderson, Jeffrey and Erickson, Joseph (Eds.), Service Learning, Educational Reform,

and the Preparation of Teachers. Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education. forthcoming Fall 1997.

McPherson, Kate (1995). Enriching Learning Through Service: A Practical Planning Guide for Classroom Teachers.

*This brief, yet practical guide for teachers is available from--*

Project Service Leadership

12703 NW 20th Ave.

Vancouver, WA. 98685

Putnam, Robert D.(1995), "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," cf.:

[http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal\\_of\\_democracy/v0006/putnam.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_democracy/v0006/putnam.html)

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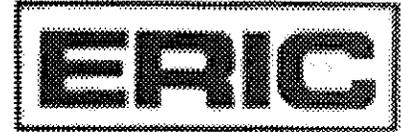
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