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Does the Service Matter?
Comparative Benefits of
Direct and Indirect Service Learning Experiences

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Abstract

This pilot study compared students' perceptions of their experiences in direct versus indirect service-learning. Middle through high school students in a suburban school district in the Northeast were surveyed about their direct and indirect service-learning experiences along personal, social, and academic dimensions. In this study, direct service experiences had a stronger positive impact on students' perceptions of their social growth than indirect service experiences. Female students rated personal and social outcomes higher than their male counterparts. Female students rated personal and social outcomes higher than their male counterparts.

Related Studies

- Growing evidence of the social, emotional, and academic benefits of service-learning.

Billig, S.H. (2004). Heads, hearts, and hands: The research on K-12 service-learning. In J. Kielsmeier, M. Neal, & M. McKinnon (Eds.), *Growing to greatness: The state of service-learning project* (pp. 12-25). St. Paul, MN: National Youth Leadership Council.

- Students who engaged in direct service are more attached to their communities whereas students who engaged in indirect service show higher levels of academic engagement.

Billig, S., Root, S., & Jesse, D. (May, 2005). The impact of participation in service-learning on high school students' civic engagement. Denver, CO: RMC Corporation: Circle working paper 33. Retrieved: August 1, 2005 from <http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/WP33Billig.pdf>.

- Two aspects of K-12 service-learning most closely associated with positive academic results are linkage with the curriculum and direct contact with those being served.

Billig, S.H. (2003). *Using evidence to make the case for service-learning as an academic achievement intervention in K-12 schools*. Retrieved August, 1, 2005 from <http://www.seanetonline.org/images/UsingEvidencetoMakeTheCaseforService.doc>.

- Middle school girls consistently expect more positive personal growth such learning to care for others, better understanding of people, and improvements in the community than boys. Middle school boys are more motivated by grades and course credit than are middle school girls.

Hecht, D., & Fusco, D.R. (1995). *Gender differences among early adolescents' motivations and expectations for service-learning*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No.ED 417 009).

Operational Definitions

Direct service

- Serving food
- Visiting a nursing home
- Tutoring

Indirect service

- Fundraising
- Recycling
- Advocacy

Delve, C.I., Mintz, S.D., & Stewart, G.M. (1990). Promoting values development through community service: A design. In C.I. Delve, S.D. Mintz, & G.M. Stewart (Eds.), *Community service as values education: New directions for student services*, no. 50 (pp. 7-29). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Dunlap, N.C., Drew, S.F., & Gibson, K. (1994). *Serving to learn: High school manual and lesson plans*. Columbia, SC: South Carolina State Department of Education.

Purpose

- Program evaluation for a school district

Research Questions

- What are the psychometric properties of a developed service learning scale for grades 5 - 12?
- Are there different personal and social as well as academic outcomes for students engaged in direct vs. indirect service learning?

Method

Participants

- 268 surveys administered
- Random sample of middle, junior high, and high school students
- Suburban community in Northeast

Procedures

- Direct and indirect service determined by two raters
- 100% inter-rater agreement
- 20 surveys were unusable
- N = 248

Results

Service Learning Outcome Survey Development

- Initial 22 item service learning survey
- Principal component analysis
- Items selected based on highest factor loadings
- Three-factor solution with 14 items
- Factors: academic, social, and personal

Survey

Survey # _____

Check one: Boy _____ Girl _____

What was your service project? _____

Think about your service project. Let us know how you feel about what you did. Tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following statements by circling the number that goes with your answer.

Personal

1. I did something helpful for the community.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|----------|----------------------|---------------|
| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree | don't know |

2. I liked the purpose of the project.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|----------|----------------------|---------------|
| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree | don't know |

3. I liked doing the project.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|----------|----------------------|---------------|
| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree | don't know |

4. I learned what I can do well.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|----------|----------------------|---------------|
| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree | don't know |

Social

5. I learned about people who were different from me.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|----------|----------------------|---------------|
| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree | don't know |

6. I learned how to get along with others.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|----------|----------------------|---------------|
| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree | don't know |

7. I liked working with others on the project.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|----------|----------------------|---------------|
| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree | don't know |

8. I had a chance to be a leader.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|----------|----------------------|---------------|
| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree | don't know |

9. I learned about problems in my community.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|----------|----------------------|---------------|
| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree | don't know |

10. I learned that I have a responsibility to help others in my community.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|----------|----------------------|---------------|
| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree | don't know |

Academic

11. I learned things that helped me with math.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|----------|----------------------|---------------|
| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree | don't know |

12. I learned things that helped me with reading.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|----------|----------------------|---------------|
| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree | don't know |

13. I learned things that helped me with writing.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|----------|----------------------|---------------|
| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree | don't know |

14. I learned things that helped me with science.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|----------|----------------------|---------------|
| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree | don't know |

Varimax Rotated Factor Matrix Showing Factor Loadings, Reliabilities, and
Summary Statistics for Service Learning Outcome Survey

| Item Topics | Factor Loadings | | | Total |
|---|-----------------|--------|--------|--------|
| | I | II | III | |
| Academic | | | | |
| Writing | .904 | .137 | .055 | |
| Reading | .896 | .184 | -.001 | |
| Math | .825 | .097 | .078 | |
| Science | .825 | .073 | .121 | |
| Social | | | | |
| Diversity | .124 | .724 | -.113 | |
| Collaboration | .256 | .696 | .152 | |
| Responsibility | .077 | .634 | .215 | |
| Community | -.014 | .566 | .101 | |
| Enjoyable | .066 | .476 | .446 | |
| Leadership | .150 | .393 | .327 | |
| Personal | | | | |
| Rewarding | -.019 | .200 | .788 | |
| Purposeful | .098 | .011 | .771 | |
| Helpful | .005 | .049 | .660 | |
| Achievement | .175 | .329 | .453 | |
| Eigenvalues | 4.163 | 2.263 | 1.317 | |
| Percent of Variance | 29.736 | 16.164 | 9.407 | 55.307 |
| Alpha Coefficients | .898 | .695 | .677 | .810 |
| Mean | 6.934 | 17.194 | 12.850 | 36.980 |
| Standard Deviation | 3.256 | 3.872 | 2.464 | 7.205 |
| Total Scale and Factor Intercorrelations | | | | |
| I | --- | .31 | .20 | .69 |
| II | | --- | .49 | .85 |
| III | | | --- | .69 |
| Total | | | | |

Descriptive Statistics and Multivariate/Univariate Analyses of Variance for
Measures of Academic, Social, and Personal Outcomes of Service Learning
According to Service Type

| Variables | Direct Service | | Indirect Service | | MANOVA | | | | ANOVA | | |
|-----------|----------------|-----|------------------|-----|---------------|------|-------|------|-------|----|------|
| | M | SD | M | SD | <i>Lambda</i> | F | df | p | F | df | p |
| | | | | | .88 | 10.4 | 3,217 | <.01 | | | |
| Academic | 6.7 | 3.5 | 7.1 | 2.9 | | | | | .87 | 1 | ns |
| Social | 18.5 | 3.4 | 16.3 | 3.7 | | | | | 20.43 | 1 | <.01 |
| Personal | 13.0 | 2.4 | 12.8 | 2.1 | | | | | .29 | 1 | ns |

Direct vs. Indirect Service Learning

- Students participating in direct service learning rated the social benefits significantly higher than students participating in indirect service learning.

Descriptive Statistics and Multivariate/Univariate Analyses of Variance for
Measures of Academic, Social, and Personal Outcomes of Service Learning
According to Gender

| Variables | Female | | Male | | MANOVA | | | | ANOVA | | |
|-----------|--------|-----|------|-----|---------------|-----|-------|------|-------|----|------|
| | M | SD | M | SD | <i>Lambda</i> | F | df | p | F | df | p |
| | | | | | .91 | 7.0 | 3,216 | <.01 | | | |
| Academic | 7.2 | 3.0 | 6.6 | 3.6 | | | | | 2.23 | 1 | ns |
| Social | 18.0 | 3.6 | 16.1 | 4.0 | | | | | 14.95 | 1 | <.01 |
| Personal | 13.4 | 1.9 | 12.0 | 3.0 | | | | | 15.30 | 1 | <.01 |

Gender Differences

- Females rated the social and personal benefits of service learning significantly higher than males.

Other Findings

- No grade level differences were found among middle, junior high, and high school students on the three factors.
- All participants rated the academic benefits lowest of the 3-factors.

Conclusions, Caveats, and Questions

- Direct service learning experiences seem to promote comparatively greater social than personal or academic benefits.
- Limited generalizability.
- Further exploration needed in regard to gender differences in personal and social outcomes.
- Need to investigate reason for low academic ratings.
- Survey instrument needs further conceptual and psychometric development.

Implications

- Personal, social, career, and academic goals of service learning need to be made clear to students.
- Personal, social, career, and academic goals of service learning may have different saliency for males and females.
- Benefits of service learning may increase with adequate preparation of students and opportunities for reflection.